

By the Grace of the Gods: Volume 5

Roy

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By the Grace of the Gods



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Eliaria begins attending the
academy in the royal capital.
She has trouble making
friends until she meets...



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Chapter 3 Episode 26: A Letter

Under the light of the morning sun, a limour bird flew to me from afar. My birds were all together, so this one could only have come from Elia. Around its neck was a cloth bearing her family's crest. It brought a letter, so I took it and gave it food and water together with my own limour birds so it could have an opportunity to rest.

The first subject the letter mentioned was the Sea of Trees. Elia had only heard rumors about it, so she just told me to be cautious. She also said that the adults don't object to my plans, but they say that I should prepare meticulously and contact them before I depart. I decided to write back and say that I'd remember to get in touch with them.

Next, she wrote about how she was about to enroll at the academy. The letter said that the enrollment period was approaching, and she wanted to get familiar with the new environment, so she planned on going to the capital next month, which could pose a problem. At the moment, we were communicating with our limour birds. She sent a bird to me, and I sent one of my birds back with that bird to learn her address, so we had a direct means of contact. When it came to memorizing routes, limour birds were supposed to be among the best bird monsters. But if she was moving to the capital, I might have to relay messages through her family from now on. She would have to live in the dorms at the academy, and they might forbid pets or something.

The rest was mostly questions about what I'd been up to lately, but one part stuck out. She said that she heard about a festival in Gimul and that it would probably be hard to get ready for it when I also had work to do, but she wished me good luck. I hadn't heard about any festival, though. I decided to go ask someone about it.



So I came into work and asked a few employees, none of whom were aware of any festival. When I really thought about it, though, just about all of my employees came from outside town. Fay and Lily were even from this country, so I couldn't expect them to know about local celebrations. That left one person who might know something. I tried asking Dolce.

"You talking about the Founding Festival? That's when we

celebrate this city's birthday. Can't think of any other festivals that'd be held around this time," he said.

"Do you know how you're supposed to prepare for the festival?"

"Depends on the store or the person."

I asked for further details. According to Dolce, there were five main points to remember about the Founding Festival:

It was being held in two months.

It took place primarily on the main street that extended throughout the city.

If it was anything like most years, preparations would begin next month.

Preparations generally involved decorating the storefront and volunteering for local cleaning activities.

You could apply to open your own stall at the festival.

Many of the stalls came from businesses that had operated in Gimul for ages, but some were run by performers that traveled from city to city. There were even some rather sketchy ones, so they weren't strict about who participated. But it was customary for houses and stores to be decorated with colorful cloth, and the festival left a lot of pollution, so the city held cleaning activities that the public could participate in.

"That's about all I know. That good enough for you?" Dolce asked.

"Yes, thanks for all the help."

The cleaning activities would give me a chance to meet my neighbors, so I planned to join in on those if at all possible, but it didn't seem like this would make me much busier as long as I didn't open a stall. Maybe Elia thought I was going to do something more, but I didn't know what. This festival was a while off, in any case, so it was just something to keep in mind for the time being. I also wanted to make sure this was common knowledge around the store. If anyone had any ideas for what we would do with a stall, maybe it would be nice to get together and do something as a group.

For now, I decided to write back to Elia saying that I would be fine. I thought about sending a gift to commemorate her moving to the capital as well, even if it was just to temporarily stay in the dorms, but I wasn't sure what to give her. It couldn't be anything that could start a fire, anything that took up much space, or anything that could damage her room to set up. Shoes would have been a bad gift in

Japan, but here they apparently symbolized taking a new step toward something, which would be fine. But I didn't know her shoe size or what style she was into, so I passed on that. Moving could be expensive, so cash or some sort of gift card or something could be good, except that she was from a rich family and likely didn't have any issues in that department. It seemed like the safest choice would be something disposable that it couldn't hurt to have. I decided that after this business with the festival was taken care of, I would wrack my brains over how best to celebrate her move.



I went to the guild early the next day.

"Hello, Paena. Here are fifty bunches of lactone grass, as the job demanded."

"Let's see here," Paena said and started to count. "Four, five... Yes, exactly fifty."

Lactone grass's effects were weak, but applicable to a wide range of symptoms. It was mainly used to treat colds. It grew just about everywhere but the harshest environments, so it was easy to come by, but also worth only one sute per ten bunches. Paena gave me five sute for the grass, which I figured I would spend on some candy or something.

"Oh, may I ask something?" Paena said.

"What?"

"Do you know a lot about medicinal herbs?"

"My grandmother taught me a lot of general information about them. Why do you ask?"

"It looks like you picked this grass very carefully, so I had a feeling you did. Would you be able to identify some tera grass for us?"

Tera grass was good for nerve pain, and much like lactone grass, it could be found anywhere. But tera grass had a poisonous variant called tura grass that grew in all the same places. They looked almost exactly alike, so they were often mistaken for each other. I could tell them apart, though. In fact, I had some on hand.

"I've actually got tera grass that I picked for personal use in the southern plains."

"Really? If you give us five bunches, then that's another job completed," Paena said. I set five bunches of tera grass on the counter for her to appraise with magic. "Yes, that's all tera grass. Are you sure we can take this? If you need it for yourself, you don't have to hand it over."

"It's fine, I don't need it for anything urgent."

"I see. Then here's seventy sute for your reward."

I received fourteen sute per bunch, a fairly high reward. I left the

guild feeling like I really earned something, and returned home while it was still bright out.



In part of the mine that I didn't normally use, I prepared to create a gift to celebrate Elia's move. The plan was to make soap. Consumable goods were a safe choice for a gift, and this would have some practical use. Soap was in common use in this country, so I didn't think there would be anything conspicuous about it. But simply buying some soap to send her would have been boring, and considering her wealth, she was probably used to receiving gifts that were simply expensive. So rather than that, I decided to send something that I made myself.

Making soap was pretty standard for light novel protagonists who reincarnated in another world. They would do things like collecting animal fat and ash, then boiling that to make the soap. But I wasn't going to go through all that effort. I had all the ingredients I needed: oil, salt, and water that I purified with alchemy, among assorted other items. Soap made of ash and animal fat had been around for ages on Earth, but in recent times, an easier method using caustic soda became more commonplace. To use that method, though, I first had to create caustic soda.

Caustic soda was also known as sodium hydroxide. One component I needed was sodium, which I could obtain by dividing the salt into its base elements. Dividing the salt generated poisonous and corrosive chlorine gas, so some caution was required. Sodium was also extremely susceptible to oxidation when exposed to air, and mixing it with water could cause it to generate heat or even an explosion, so after carefully using alchemy to create a lump of sodium, I removed any oxygen. I couldn't prevent the surface from being a little oxidized, but I halted the process by soaking it in a container full of oil.

Next, I prepared the water. When I added a tiny piece of sodium to a container full of water, there was a sound like the burning of a lit fuse as the surface of the water began to ripple. It was a hydrolysis reaction producing sodium hydroxide and hydrogen. I appraised the container's contents and found that the water had also become an aqueous solution of sodium hydroxide. Dividing this solution into its component parts would give me water and caustic soda, my final goal.

In addition to the danger of a potential explosion caused by adding sodium to water, sodium hydroxide also has high alkali content that makes it corrosive, so getting any of this solution on my skin would be extremely dangerous. I wanted to use a generally unused part of the mine for this in case anything happened, but I also picked a place with plenty of ventilation, and wore overalls in

addition to cleaner slime goggles and a helmet. I even wore recently purchased gloves to make sure no skin was exposed as I worked.

I successfully refined the sodium hydroxide. If I had used a combination circle to create it directly from sodium and water, maybe it would have been a bit safer and more efficient. Alchemy lets you skip the chemical reaction step and get straight to the final product, after all. In any case, now I was finally ready to make soap from caustic soda.

I had to keep all this equipment on to handle it safely, but the rest of the process wasn't that difficult. I measured the caustic soda and water, then added the caustic soda to the water container and mixed it together. The caustic soda reacted with the water and generated heat, so I had to watch out for the steam and rapid boiling. Putting the water in the container first and gradually adding the caustic soda afterward was the safe way to do it. Next, I heated the oil and slowly added the cooled caustic soda solution. I thoroughly mixed it all together, and when it got heavy, I threw in some materials to add a nice scent. Then I poured the mixture into molds, finishing the job for now. All that remained was to keep it warm for a few days until it solidified.

But if there was any caustic soda left after the soap hardened, it could burn skin when used, so I had to be wary of that too. I had made soap from waste oil a few times before, but this was meant for Elia, not for me. I didn't want to take any chances, so I stuck to the basics and didn't try putting too much of my own spin on the process for this first batch. I wanted to experiment with this a few more times using different amounts of caustic soda and leaving it to harden for different amounts of time. Other types of oil or additional ingredients could also change the color, foaminess, texture, and effects of the soap. Creating soap was relatively easy by itself, so I wanted to mess around with it at the same time I was studying medicine. But it was going to take some time for this to solidify, and I had work in the afternoon. I decided that I would experiment with soap a little bit each night.

Chapter 3 Episode 27: Urgent Business

I did the same thing each day for much of the next month. In addition to my basic training each morning, I also studied medicine, which went nicely thanks to my prior knowledge. I trained and collected food while I was out picking herbs as of late, and I proactively accepted jobs to exterminate harmful creatures. My metal and iron slimes also learned to transform into weapons, and got good enough at it to be fairly usable.

When I came to the store one morning, I received an urgent message from the branch store in Lenaf. It said that their slimes had multiplied too much and that Caulkin's team couldn't form contracts with all of them. I had no choice but to go take them for myself. After confirming that I had nothing else scheduled, I departed from Gimul. Just as the sun was about to set, I arrived at the branch store. The last time I traveled from Gimul to this town, it took me until afternoon the following day, but now I managed to race here in less than a day. Even in a world as fantastical as this one, the distance between cities didn't randomly change. This could only mean that I had gotten faster. I used space magic all the time when traveling between home, Gimul, and the wilderness around the city, so I must have improved without noticing. It didn't seem like my running speed changed much, so the distance I traversed with each teleportation had presumably changed. It would be something to test and confirm later, but I was glad that my daily training was paying off.

I felt some sense of accomplishment as I passed through the door to the store. They were still open, and there were a fair number of customers.

"Boss!" Carla shouted to me from the counter when I got in line.

"Hello," I said.

"Thank goodness. Did you come to town just for us?"

"Of course." I turned to Tony. "Where are the slimes?"

"This way. Lobelia, Carla, can you handle the customers?" Tony asked.

"No problem, leave it to us," Lobelia said.

"You two take care of the slimes, please," Carla requested.

I followed Tony to the employees' living quarters. They seemed to be temporarily using one of the rooms to hold the slimes. They were

being watched closely, and an adventurer I hired as a guard was standing outside the room.

"It's nice to see you again," I said. "Thanks for standing watch."

"The boss? Thanks for hiring me."

"How's it going?"

"Nothing much going on. Just a room full of slimes back there. There haven't been any intruders, and they're not trying to get away or anything. Caulkin's in there, so you can ask him about it."

We entered the room.

"Caulkin, it's been a while."

"Oh! Boss, you're here sooner than expected."

"I came running as soon as I got the message. So are these all the slimes that need to make a contract?"

The room contained a bunk bed, a desk, and a chair. Caulkin was sitting at the desk and writing something, surrounded by cleaner slimes.

"Yes, there's seventy-five in all."

I decided to get started right away.



"Is that all of them?" I asked after I made the last contract.

"Exactly seventy-five, yes," Caulkin said.

"Are you running low on magical energy?" Tony asked. "If so, we have some potions."

"I'm fine. I have plenty of magical energy to spare," I said. I had to make more contracts back when I got a big rush of scavenger slimes. "What caused this sudden increase in slimes, though?"

"I jotted down what I know in these documents," Caulkin said and handed me the papers on the desk. I gave them a read.

Cause 1: A rapid increase in customers.

This town contains the dragoon guild, the base of operations for delivery people who use flying monsters. Many of them come and go from this city, along with customers who wish to send packages or ride their mounts as passengers. People from outside town have thus heard about our business from our regular customers and started to use our services as of late. Of course, the increased business has provided more food for the slimes.

Cause 2: Adjusting the production of deodorizing fluid.

By taking in plentiful nutrients, the cleaner slimes began to produce a far greater supply of deodorizing fluid than we require to meet demands, and we always have unsold stock. While this doesn't harm our business in any way, we still tried to have them produce less.

“And the excess nutrients caused the cleaner slimes to multiply?” I asked.

“That’s right,” Tony confirmed.

“Rather than put a limit on fluid production, we’ve instead decided to throw out any surplus material,” Caulkin said.

“It was only for a few days that we tried limiting the amount, but it caused a lot of unnecessary stress.”

“You can’t form any more contracts anyway. I think that’s fine,” I said.

If they ended up with too many more slimes, I would have to reveal the secret of big slimes. Well, not that it would be so bad to share that with Caulkin’s group, but they were still learning how to run the store. I didn’t want to distract them too much. Sharing information on new types of slimes would be one thing, but anything about big slimes would be like a bombshell to them. Thankfully there could be over a hundred slimes and they still wouldn’t combine unless they all had a contract with the same tamer, apparently. Maybe that was because they had different chains of command or something. It would be easiest to research that if I had helpers, so I intended to teach them about this at some point. Just not right away.

In any case, I was glad that they took care of this situation appropriately. All the employees seemed worried about how they would manage the slimes, but now that problem was settled.

“Are there any other issues here?” I asked.

“Nothing that hasn’t been mentioned in our regular reports to Gimul,” Caulkin said.

“We haven’t been attacked like the main store has. The worst we’ve had to deal with is drunks standing around here after closing hours,” Tony added.

“Sales have been pretty good too. The city’s smaller than Gimul, so we have fewer regular customers, but we’re still earning a net profit of ten thousand sute per day.”

If that was true, I would need to prepare another branch store for them to run themselves at some point. It wouldn’t be long before we accrued enough funds to open another store. It was nice to know that everything was going smoothly.

I wanted to share my information about the deodorant slime, but first, I decided that I should give the Saionji Company a visit. If I started a conversation about slimes now, I might forget to do that.

“Excuse me,” I said as I entered the spice store.

“Hello! Oh? Aren’t you the boy from Bamboo Forest?” the employee at the counter asked. It was someone I met here last time.

“It’s nice to see you again. I’m surprised you remember me.”

“Well, the president never stops talking about how great you are. Not to mention you own a store right nearby, so you’re kind of hard to forget.”

“I guess you have a point.”

“What brings you here today?”

“I had to come to town on some urgent business, so I figured I should say hi to Pioro as long as I’m here.”

“I’m sorry, but the president went to the capital on a business trip three days ago. His daughter is about to enroll in school there too, so she went along with him.”

“I see; that’s too bad.”

“Oh, but his wife is here. She’s in the middle of a meeting, but if you don’t mind waiting a bit, you can talk to her.”

I decided to wait. I brought a gift for them, so if there was any opportunity to see them, I wanted to take it. “Can you show me what’s on sale here while I’m waiting?” I asked. “If anything smells particularly good, I might want it.”

“Of course. We just got some cinnamon in stock that—?!”

The clerk was about to step out from behind the counter when I heard a woman shriek from the back of the store.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Who knows? Actually, that sounded like Clana. I’m sorry, can you give me a moment? I’ll go check on her,” the clerk said and ran to the back of the store.

When I was starting to wonder whether she’d come back, a meek man came in from the next store over. He apologized and bowed repeatedly, then walked away like a gentle breeze. When he exited the spice store, a gust of wind from outside carried a horrid stench to my nose, something that I could only guess came from him. The man absolutely reeked. He even seemed to be wincing himself, and all the other pedestrians steered clear of him.

Then the clerk returned. “I’m sorry about the wait. Come with me, please.”



“Ryoma, good to see you,” Clana greeted me.

“Hello, Clana.”

Rather than the reception room, I was taken to a dining table. Maybe I would have wondered more about that if I wasn’t so distracted by Clana’s nose. I didn’t know if she had rhinitis or what. She looked as beautiful as ever and tried to hide it in a refined way, but I could see her sniffing.

“Clana, are you sick?” I asked.

“No, don’t worry. Just ate something kind of crazy.”

“What was it?”

“Shappaya, I think it’s called? It’s fish soaked in some fluid full of salt and a bunch of herbs, then fermented, apparently.”

“Oh, and it smells horrible, right?”

“You’ve heard of this stuff?”

“I don’t know if this is what I’m thinking of, but I know of some processed food that’s similar.”

What Clana most likely ate was some type of *kusaya*, a Japanese variety of fermented fish. Somebody came to try and sell it, and Clana tasted a sample. But as with all beastkin, she was highly sensitive to odors, so it seemed it was a bit much for her.

“Here’s something you’ll hopefully enjoy more,” I said. “The women at my store all love these cakes.”

“Oh my, thank you!”

I handed the cake to Clana, then we enjoyed a pleasant conversation.



I spent the entire night talking to the research team and got no sleep. I had breakfast and left to return to Gimul, but the road to the gate was busy. Wondering if something happened, I asked around for answers.

“A couple adventurers got in a fight,” one pedestrian said.

“They’ve already been arrested, but they started throwing these weird barrels at each other in the middle of it, and just—Ugh!”

The wind started to blow our way and brought a rotten stench with it. As I approached the source of the smell, it made my eyes water. After the odor drove some of the crowd away, I noticed the smelly man from yesterday being hounded by everyone else.

“Hey! Do something about this stench! My equipment smells awful!” a shopkeeper demanded.

“I’m sorry; there’s nothing I can do.”

“Keep this crap away from my store, it’s driving customers away! Why do you have barrels full of garbage anyway?”

“It’s not garbage! This is shappaya! It’s a preserved food!”

“Calm down, everyone. He’s a victim too,” a guard pointed out.

“I know, but this smelly filth got all over my store and my goods. The store and my equipment should be fine after some cleaning, but I can’t sell those goods now.”

“I’ll have the actual perpetrator pay you back. First, please describe the situation and the damages.”

The fish and the murky fluid that seemed to be the source of the smell had splattered all over the place. The fluid was evidently contained in some barrels small enough to hold in one hand. This was

all caused when adventurers threw those at each other, I guess. The guards were trying to get this mess under control, but they couldn't deal with all these people demanding compensation. Some of the rage seemed to be directed at the timid man with the barrels, but he was as much a victim as they were. I had to feel bad for him. This was also a good opportunity to advertise my laundromat, so I decided to help him out. I entered an empty alley and prepared my deodorant slime.

Chapter 3 Episode 28: The Gift

After I deodorized the street and stores as much as possible, the victims thanked me and offered assorted goods. I accepted their offers, advertised my laundromat, and left town.

“Can you hold on a second?!” someone shouted right as I was about to exit the gate. It was the man with the smelly food who was being blamed for the incident earlier. He was riding a carriage and undergoing a security check at the gate. “Thank goodness I made it in time,” he said.

“Do you need something?” I asked.

“I wanted to thank you for before, but by the time I got back there, they said you had already left,” he explained. He, along with the other victims, had been temporarily taken to the guard station. Not because they were under arrest, of course, but so that they could be compensated for the damages they suffered. I cleaned the street while they were away and deodorized their stores in the order that they returned, but this man seemed to be last. As a result, we had apparently missed each other. “Oh, if you’re leaving through this gate too, would you like to travel with me? From the looks of it, you’re traveling by foot. You can ride with me, if you want.”

It would have been faster for me to travel on my own, but this sounded like an opportunity. If this was his way of thanking me, then I wanted to take him up on his offer.



“You’ve been a traveling merchant for twelve years, Mondo? You’re pretty much a veteran.”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far. Plenty of people have been at it for thirty, even forty years. I only just recently managed to start my own business, actually. And it’s in Reetil, if you know where that is. It’s a village near Lake Latoin.”

“I’ve never heard of a village called Reetil, but isn’t Lake Latoin the biggest lake in the country?” It was also the location of monsters I wanted to train against, so it was listed in the documents I received from the guild as well. There were many fishing villages around Lake Latoin, one of which was the home of an adventuring party I met before. “I know a village called Sikum that’s around there.”

“Sikum is on the opposite shore from Reetil. I generally go around

the lake selling everyday necessities to small villages like that one.”

“I would’ve thought you sold food.”

“Because of the shappaya? That’s made in Reetil. My father was a fisherman there, and he told me that if I want to leave home rather than inherit the family business, I should at least find a way to sell this stuff and support the village. He foists it on me whenever I visit home. It just doesn’t sell, though. After it’s all washed and cooked, it doesn’t smell quite so bad. But it does still smell bad. It’s no surprise that nobody wants it, but it’s frustrating all the same.”

“I saw what happened at the Saionji Company.”

“Did you? If only they would’ve bought it, but the smell just drives everyone away. Oh well, I just have to keep trying. So which way are you headed, Ryoma?” Mondo asked. We saw a crossroads in the distance. Gimul was to the left. “I’m going right.”

“Then I’ll have to get off here.”

“You’re going left. Alright then,” he said, and the carriage stopped. He searched through the luggage and took out a tightly sealed barrel. “Take a barrel with you, if you’d like. It’s the least I can do to thank you. As long as you have this, most wild animals and monsters won’t even try to attack you. Especially the ones with strong noses.”

Getting a ride in his carriage was thanks enough for me, but he seemed to have nothing but good intentions with this offer, so I accepted his generosity. It couldn’t hurt to keep monsters away. This seemed to be a better application of this food than actually using it as food. Maybe that was why Mondo’s dad forced him to take it around with him.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Don’t mention it. Have a nice trip.”

I parted ways with Mondo, and after he was out of sight, I ran down the road to Gimul.



I picked some medicinal herbs on the way back, so I didn’t reach Gimul until after noon the next day. I went straight to my store to exchange information, and as usual, business was booming. But they did have two unusual reports to make. For one, Serge wanted to have a meeting with me.

“Well, of course, I don’t mind, but why?” I asked.

“He just said that it was about magic items,” Carme said, which I took to mean the music boxes. Maybe something happened with those, but that was something to think about later.

“I’ll meet with him as scheduled, then. What’s the other thing?”

“We received a thank-you letter and a gift from Fina, Jane, and

Maria's village," Carme answered. I had never been sent a thank-you letter before, as far as I can remember. "They've been exchanging letters with people back home, it seems. The letter thanked you for treating the girls so well. The gift was left on the second floor."

On the second floor, we had set up a room for temporarily storing laundry. We had gotten more efficient since we first opened and customers received their laundry right away, so the room was now extraneous, but it was fairly large. If they had to leave the gift there, it sounded like it was pretty big. Carme said he was going to go bring someone who could explain, so I decided to head up to the second floor ahead of him.

The second floor was packed with mysterious sacks, over twenty in all. I touched one, and it felt like it was full of some sort of grain, but based on the smell, I thought it might be sesame seeds. I cast Appraisal to find out.

Semesa Seeds

Highly oily and nutritious. These seeds are relatively simple to cultivate, but they have a peculiar aroma, which is further amplified when they are heated.

It turned out to be something like sesame seeds after all. Sesame seeds on Earth didn't give off an aroma until they were roasted, but these were already awfully fragrant.

"Boss, I brought Jane," Carme said as he arrived.

"Thank you. Jane, can you tell me why we were sent all this?"

"I'm sorry, Boss. We just sent letters to our parents saying how great this store is, and they just went and decided to do this. These bags are all filled with wheat and semesa, healthy crops. They wanted to thank you and the rest of the employees for everything, and they're hoping that we keep working together," Jane explained. She chose her words carefully out of, I assumed, respect for her parents. "It's a bribe," she then said, no longer choosing her words carefully at all. It's nice that she was honest, I guess.

"Are these kinds of gifts common?"

"They're given occasionally," Carme explained. "Parents sent them in the hope that their children will get to work in a nice environment. Not all bosses are the best people, and when it comes to daughters in particular, parents inevitably get worried. If the child is already in a good environment, the parents ask that things continue as they are, and if not, then they send gifts in an attempt to curry favor. That's most likely what this is about."

"I think I get it. I've never been a parent, so I'm sure their feelings about their children are stronger than I could imagine. But I have to

imagine they're taking a hit by sending all this grain."

Jane and the other girls from her village were only here because they needed the money in the first place. I didn't know how her parents or village could have that much to spare. But when I asked Jane about that, she said that it wasn't a burden to them at all. According to her, their village was northeast of Gimul, close to the national border, and they were a decently wealthy farming town until about a decade ago. Their main crops were wheat and potatoes, but they also grew semesa and vegetables. Most of the crops were sold to the country across the border, but when that country enacted a plan to develop farmland about ten years ago, their business gradually dwindled.

The man in charge of the development plan was the son of one of the younger children of the lord of this land, one who wouldn't succeed the lord. With the lord's help, he received plentiful funding and hired specialists who turned this project into a great success. This territory became famous for its grain production, but Jane's village lost its customers and most of its income. The other villages in the area continued their relations with their old food sources and didn't have the money to buy from new ones, so the village never found a new client to sell to. They were forced to send their healthy youths to work in bigger cities. But that was caused by their inability to sell crops, so food was the one thing they didn't have to worry about.

"We still have enough crops to give as taxes and to eat, we just also have all the crops we can't sell, so there's more than we'll ever need. Oh, but they're high-quality crops, I guarantee it!" Jane exclaimed.

"Is there any way you could harvest less so you didn't have excess crops that aren't good for anything? It seems like sending people away to work in the cities wouldn't leave enough farmers around to handle all of this anyway."

"If we had crop failure one year without reserves on hand, there could be trouble. There are also a lot of people who want to protect the local farms that we've looked after for generations. We pool our money together to buy magic items and cows to use for farm labor. We can feed the excess wheat to the livestock, so that's a convenient way to not let it go to waste. But they're so serious about farming that we always end up with more than we need, sadly."

It kind of started to sound like she was complaining. If that was all true, though, then I couldn't just send the grain back.

"Got it," I said. "But next time you contact your family, tell them that we don't need gifts like this. It won't change how I treat anyone. Personally, if they have anyone who'd be able to work, I'd rather they send new employees going forward."

“Really?”

I had no particular aversion to hiring someone because of their connections, and if I was going to open more branch stores, then I’d need more workers. This was something I’d have to discuss with Carme, but if it were just my decision, I’d take anyone who could do the work. I took great advantage of my connections with the duke’s family, the Morgan Trading Company, and the guildmasters, so I couldn’t blame anyone else for doing the same.

“Just remember, it has to be somebody who’ll do the work and won’t cause trouble,” I emphasized. “Don’t recommend somebody that’ll demand special treatment. And I don’t want any of you to give them special treatment just because they’re from your village, either. If they have some sort of special needs, then we can talk about accommodations, though.”

“Of course! That’s more than good enough!”

“Good. What do you think, Carme?”

“As long as they’re interviewed and closely supervised, I think it should be fine,” Carme said. “You’re right that we’ll need new employees at some point, and it will be easiest to hire people that someone here can vouch for.”

“Thank goodness. Oh, and as for these crops, can you have them assessed?”

“If you want to know approximately how much they’re worth, I’ve already written something up. If you want an exact value, I would recommend asking the person in charge of foodstuffs at the merchant’s guild.”

“I see. If you’ve already calculated the value, can you send that much money to the village? I feel like there are problems with accepting this much grain for nothing.”

“Understood, I’ll take care of it.”

“Hold on a second!” Jane cried. “You’re going to buy all of this? You shouldn’t have to do that! They’re the ones who decided to send it to you.”

“But it’d just go to waste if I sent it back, right? We can use it for food at the store; don’t worry about it,” I reassured her.

“Well, then at least buy it for as little as possible.”

“Then I’ll send them the cost price plus the shipping cost,” Carme said. “Is that fine with you two?”

“Fine with me,” I said.

“Then it’s fine with me too,” Jane agreed.

We accepted Carme’s compromise. Jane didn’t seem to fully agree with the idea, but muttered to herself and tried to get over it. Well, the most important thing was that her village found a new place to sell their grain.

Chapter 3 Episode 29: The Music Box Sales Project

Near the end of work hours that night, Serge visited the store.

"I heard that you wanted to talk about the music boxes," I said.

"Right. Let me start with a report on the current situation.

Through our partnership with the Dinome Magic Item Workshop, we should soon be able to put the music boxes on sale. We're currently manufacturing some to ensure we have enough in stock."

It had only been a few months, but they were already nearly ready to start selling the things. He showed me some sample products as we talked.

"So there are some targeted at nobles, and some targeted at commoners?" I asked.

"Yes. The music boxes for nobles are, as you can see, decorative boxes with the magic item contained inside. The boxes are specially ordered from a box craftsman, and they were made to order based on the motifs and materials our clients demanded."

That meant that these boxes were one-of-a-kind luxury items. The boxes came from a separate source, so this also reduced Dinome's workload. The music boxes for commoners, on the other hand, used small wooden boxes with the branding burned into them, but they otherwise weren't decorated. These looked affordable.

"It looks like the ones for nobles are only made to order, so is it these ones for commoners that will be put on sale first?"

"Indeed. My company is already prepared to sell the ones for nobles, but I'm planning to unveil the music boxes for commoners at the founding festival."

"So they'll be sold out of a stall?"

"Correct. The songs we will be using for the music boxes were contributed by a bard who's been popular as of late, on the condition that his name and the names of his songs are printed on the boxes. He leads a group of traveling performers called the Semroid Troupe that will be performing in Gimul, and we intend to sell the music boxes where they're performing," Serge said. He was quick to find a good way to sell these, from the sound of it.

"I'd love to hear the performance. Where will it be taking place?"

"I actually wanted to discuss that."

Serge asked if my store could be used as a green room on the day

of the festival, and if the vacant space that we use for security training could be the location of the stage. I thought it would be best to ask my employees for their opinions first, so I asked Serge if I could call Carme and Fay over. We explained the situation to them, and after some discussion, decided that it would be fine to use the vacant space. For the green room, however, we went with an empty room in the employee lodges rather than the store itself. This was on the condition that they couldn't enter any of the other rooms, of course.

"Thank you for your cooperation," Serge said. "Now I'll have good news for them too. The troupe is expected to arrive in Gimul in about two weeks. Upon their arrival, I will be back to introduce them to you."

I attended Serge out the door as he left, then turned to return to the store.

"Wait, did anyone else hear a strange sound?" I asked.

"I think it came from the kitchen," Fay said. "I'll go check." He swiftly headed off. Others asked me if there was actually a sound at all. It was very quiet, so I couldn't blame them. When Fay got back, he said, "Boss, there's a barrel in the kitchen that smells funny. It looks like Chelma opened it without knowing what it was."

"A barrel that smells funny? Uh oh," I gasped. It was the shappaya. I left it in the kitchen because it was food. "I'm sorry. I put that there. It's preserved food that I was given."

"You did? Then you better rush over there if you want to keep it," Fay said. "She's going to throw it away." I didn't want that to happen, no matter how it smelled. That was a gift from Mondo.

"Excuse me for one second!" I cried and headed to the kitchen. The barrel of shappaya was in the wincing chef's hands. She was just about to toss it in the trash. "Stop!"

"Eek! Boss, what is it?" Chelma asked.

"I'm sorry, but I was given that food. I know it stinks, but it's not garbage."

"Oh my, is that so? I'm sorry about that."

"No, I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. I'll deodorize it right away."

I put a lid on the barrel and had my deodorant slime eliminate the stench in the kitchen. I was used to this by now, so it took no time at all.

"Done," I said.

"Thank you. But is that stuff actually edible?" Chelma asked, unable to believe it. The smell was certainly intense. I had some tolerance for bad smells, and even on Earth I could eat foods like this without an issue. But for people who weren't used to it, this was probably hard to stomach.

"You're supposed to wash it before you eat it, I'm told. That's

supposed to remove some of the smell. Do you want to try it?"

"As a chef I'm curious, but I'm a little hesitant," she admitted. The shock from opening the barrel must have been big. She furrowed her brow as if remembering when she got a direct whiff of the stench.

After I thought about it a bit, I already had proof that the deodorant slime could eliminate the smell of the shappaya fluid. In that case, maybe I could try soaking the shappaya in the deodorant slime's fluid.

"Do you mind if I try something?" I asked. "I'll put up a barrier and do it in there." I may have been the boss, but Chelma was in charge of the kitchen. She was in the middle of cooking dinner too, so I wanted to get her permission before engaging in my little culinary experiment. Once she approved, I took the shappaya out of the barrel and placed it in a large bowl. I thought the fish would be mushier, but it mostly retained its shape. When I lined them up, they looked like dried fish that you would find at the market. Then I asked my deodorant slime to pour odor-displacing fluid onto it until it was fully submerged. I decided to wait and see how it smelled in ten minutes.



Ten minutes later, I took the shappaya out of the fluid and washed it under a weak stream of running water so it wouldn't fall apart. The deodorant slime's fluid wasn't poisonous, but I still meticulously used water magic to make sure no contamination remained. Incredibly enough, the smell was virtually gone.

Next I grilled the shappaya over a fire and gave it a taste. The savory flavor of the fermented fish permeated my mouth. Maybe the flavor had been somewhat diminished, but it was still perfectly good. It did seem like a bit of the fluid's stench seeped into the fish, however. Maybe it would have been better if I soaked it for longer. I had such a tolerance for bad odors, so I couldn't be entirely sure myself.

"Chelma, it smells a lot better now. How's this?" I asked.

"Oh, you're right. Let me try some," she said and tossed a piece in her mouth. "Nevermind, it still kind of smells. Compared to before, though, this is some great progress. It was painfully smelly at first, while this is just mildly unpleasant, and it tastes great. If you cooked it with some herbs or something, it might be more appealing."

If that was enough to cover up this smell, maybe giger would do the trick. I didn't have any on hand, however. Nor did I have any herbs. But we did have all that semesa, so I grabbed a bag of it from the second floor and used alchemy to extract its oil. The oil had its own unique fragrance, and I knew that heating it up would make the smell stronger. I poured some in a frying pan and put it over a fire

until it began to exude a powerful aroma, then I tossed the shappaya on top. Once one side was cooked, I flipped it over and did the other. I kept cooking until both sides were crispy.

“Is it done?” Chelma asked.

“Yes. How is it?”

Chelma tried some. “Well, the smell isn’t as bothersome anymore. This could work for a meal, or it could go well with drinks.”

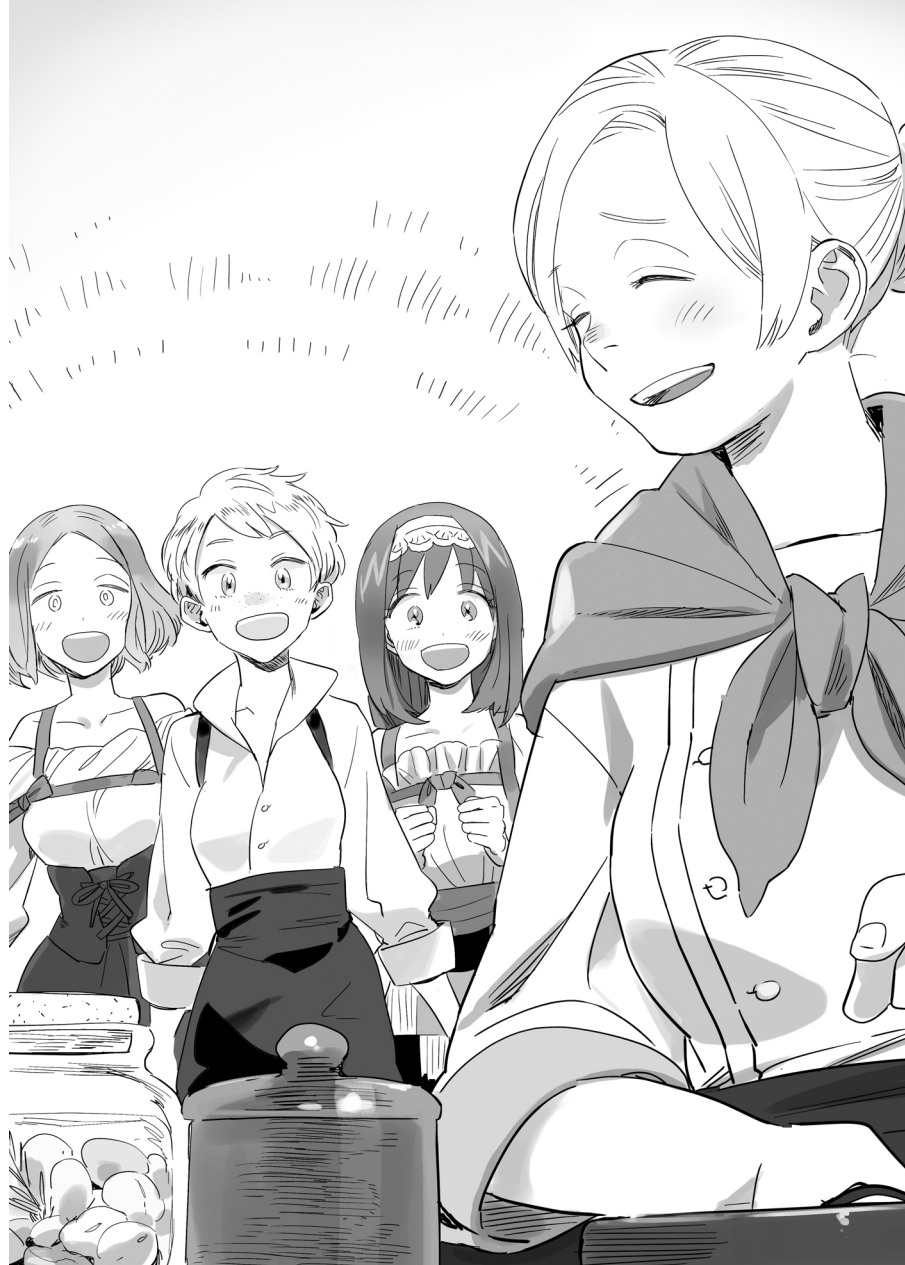
Just then, I felt someone looking at us from the entrance. “That smell brings back memories!” they said. I turned around and saw the three village girls standing there.

“Semesa reminds us of home, sorry,” said Jane.

“This smell makes me hungry!” said Fina.

“Boss, is that tonight’s dinner?!” asked Jane.

It was only supposed to be an experiment, but there was no reason not to put it on the menu. As a result, we had one extra side dish to eat with dinner that night.





Chelma's cooking was as simple, yet delicious as ever. All the employees also enjoyed the shappaya fried in semesa oil. Removing the odor with the displacing fluid seemed to be highly effective. Now that I discovered this new use for odor-displacing fluid, I somewhat regretted not buying more shappaya. It never hurt to have food, especially delicious food that wouldn't go bad.

After dinner, Jane made dandelion coffee for me. Everyone else had their own preferred drinks. Jane was in unusually high spirits, but so were the other two village girls. I didn't know if they were just that happy that we used ingredients from their hometown or what. When I asked them, they said that was part of it, but it also had to do with what I said that afternoon.

"We're just thinking about how you might hire other folks from the village!" said Maria.

"Oh, of course, it's fine if we get split up between different branches. I mean, this is a nice, safe place to work. If we're able to work comfortably here, others from the village are going to be interested," said Jane.

"And there might be more villagers who have to go out of town for work in the future. If they all have a safe place to make money, it'll help us rest easy," said Fina.

"I see," I said.

"Well, it'd be best if our crops sold, though!"

"Yeah, then we could all live together," said Maria.

"Throwing out those delicious ingredients would be an awful waste," said Fay.

"We would never even consider such a thing in our country," said Lilyn.

"What do you eat in your country?" I asked.

"The staple food in our country is called miang. It's made by thickening flour with water, similar to bread. But rather than bake it, we put it in soup. You can make it long and thin to create lee miang, or make flat, thick pieces called pa miang," Fay explained. It sounded like he was describing noodles. Or if it was supposed to go in soup, maybe it was closer to dumplings.

"Sounds neat," Maria said.

"I wonder what foreign food tastes like," Chelma said.

"Are you interested? I can make some next time," Lilyn offered.

"Can you, Lilyn?"

"I've been wanting to eat some too. All I'll need is flour, water, and some kind of soup. Everyone in our country is poor, so it won't

take any special ingredients.”

“What if we did the same for the stall at the festival?” Carme suggested. “It wouldn’t hurt to simply lend out our space for the performance, but as long as that’s happening, I think it would be ideal if we can profit off it too. We can serve foreign food to the audience who comes to watch the troupe. If we set up something to draw their attention, I’m sure they’ll be interested enough to buy some. Customers are more willing to spend during festivals, and even if they weren’t, it’ll be profitable for us if it serves as a chance to bond with the locals.”

It sounded like a random suggestion at first, but it seemed that he had it all thought out. Business was going well for us, so we had money to spare. This would be sort of like giving back to the community, but if we were going to do this, it’d take more than just me and Carme.

“I can help out. I’ve got nothing better to do,” Dolce offered first, to my surprise. I thought he was focused on writing in his diary, but apparently he was listening.

“I have no experience running a stall at a festival, but serving food to lots of people is fun. Especially if the customers tell you it’s tasty,” Chelma said, getting on board.

“If we take turns having different shifts like during regular business hours, everyone should have time to see the festival too,” I said.

“I’d run out of money if I spent the whole day having fun, so I guess some work is fine!” said Maria.

“I’m in,” said Lilyn.

“I’m with my daughter,” said Fay.

“Same here,” said Jane. “Oh! Carme, can we use wheat from our village as ingredients?”

“We would have to set up a proper environment to store it in, but as long as it’s of adequate quality, I don’t see why not. Why do you ask?”

“So that if any customers want to know where the wheat came from, we can tell them.”

“I don’t think that’s happening,” said Fina.

“No, probably not. But I’m in anyway.”

With that, everyone was on board. I still didn’t feel that excited about the whole idea, though. It was fine, I guess, but it just felt like a spur-of-the-moment sort of thing. But that’s the way the conversation went, and I couldn’t complain.

“Then we’ll have to taste-test different dishes, research the cost of ingredients, make the proper arrangements with the Morgan Company, and such. We can think about that tomorrow, I suppose,” I

said. I didn't know if I was still going to feel like opening a stall later, but if I did, I figured I might as well have one for the festival.

Chapter 3 Episode 30: The Semroid Troupe

Two weeks later, my store was busier than usual due to the preparations for the festival. Throughout the past two weeks, we tried to recreate regional cuisines, decided who was going to cook what, made arrangements with our representative from the Morgan Company regarding security and customer service, and more. The preparations were hectic for everyone, but it didn't lower our morale, which I was secretly relieved about.

My company on Earth had yearly recreational events to strengthen the unity of its employees, but they only seemed intended to satisfy the higher-ups. Aside from the event planner, hardly anyone was ever excited for these events, but we were forced to attend. It just meant that we lost our days off.

I understand what their intentions were. It's better when everyone feels united, obviously. That was the culture there, so there wasn't much to be done about it, but I didn't want my employees to feel like we did at that company. But everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves for now, and as our stall gradually came together, their motivation only appeared to increase. Besides just my employees, we also had some unexpected help.

"Boss! Sieg the butcher's here!" Someone called out to me.

"I'll be right there!" I said. I was working on getting the empty lot set up, but stopped and headed to the reception room. "I'm sorry I kept you."

"Wasn't waiting that long," Sieg said. "So, this is today's share. The goods have already been taken to the kitchen."

"This is a little cheaper than I was expecting."

"You buy a ton from us, so you get a little discount."

Sieg was one of our helpers. He not only provided us with meat to use when test-cooking different dishes, but on the day of the festival, he and his employees also planned to help us run the stall. When I bought a bunch of materials for cooking the other day, he asked why I was buying so much. After I explained the reason, he ultimately agreed to help out.

From what he said, it sounded like he and his employees wanted to spend time at the festival with their families. But their wives would get mad if they wasted too much money, so they all intended to help

at our stall for one of the two festival days in exchange for some extra cash. They got more money to spend at the festival, while we didn't have to work as much, which meant we had more opportunities to meet people.

It was a win-win for us, and when Pauline, Kiara, and Mary heard about the deal, they wanted to help with cooking and running the stall under the same conditions. They were working with Chelma in the kitchen as I spoke with Sieg. By getting those housewives involved, by the way, they used their housewife information network to spread news of the Semroid Troupe's performance. A lot of Pauline's friends expressed interest, apparently. I worried that we could end up with a huge crowd like when we first opened, so we had to prepare for that possibility.

"See you tonight, Ryoma," Sieg said and left the store. After I saw him off, I decided to get back to work on the empty lot. That night, we were holding a party to finalize the menu for our stall. I had to at least get everything in order for that.



After work that night, I was checking documents in my office as I waited for guests to arrive. That was when Carme came to see me.

"Boss, Mr. Morgan and the Semroid Troupe's representative have arrived," he said.

"Thank you," I replied and rushed to the reception room. "Excuse me, I hope you weren't waiting too long."

"Good evening, Master Ryoma," Serge said. "This is the leader of the Semroid Troupe."

"My name is Prenance Semroid," the leader said. "I'm still young, but I lead a troupe of traveling entertainers. A pleasure to make your acquaintance, young sage."

Serge was sitting on the couch next to Prenance, an oddly eye-grabbing, attractive man with hair like silver thread. Prenance stood up for a handshake, so I gave him one, but the dramatic way he spoke and acted was somewhat off-putting.

"It's nice to meet you too. You can just call me Ryoma. I hardly deserve to be called a sage."

"Oh, quite the humble one you are. Those music boxes play some fine music. They're magnificent. That music offers a very different flavor from our own performances, so to speak. This allows my music to reach more people, and that's simply delightful. You came up with the idea, so if you don't deserve to be called a sage, then who does?" Maybe for someone involved in music, it was actually that incredible. Or maybe he was just flattering me. Not to be rude, but my first impression of Prenance was that he seemed hard to work with.

“Thanks, I guess?”

“I’m the one who should be thanking you. Not only did you grace us with your music boxes, but you’ve provided us a place to perform as well.”

“Yes, but it’ll just be in a lot that we use occasionally.”

“I took a little look at it on the way here, and it’s more than big enough. My troupe is pleased.”

“Are they here already?”

“Yes, they’re at the party site,” Prenance said. That was exactly as intended. I didn’t want too many people to know extensive details about the music boxes or the fact that I came up with them. I only wanted the representative here so that could be part of the discussion.

“Then I would hate to make them wait too long. Shall we begin this meeting properly?” I asked. Once they approved, we moved on to the next topic.



“Then when it comes to the stage in general, we’ll leave that matter to the Semroid Troupe,” I said.

“You can count on us,” Prenance replied. “It will be a great stage the likes of which has never been seen before.” The Semroid Troupe was still making a name for itself, and usually performed in cramped spaces like bars or town squares, so they seldom got opportunities to put on a show for large crowds.

“Thank you. If you need anything, feel free to tell me. Serge or Carme can provide any supplies or extra workers that you need, but if you just need assistance transporting goods or setting up the stage, I think I can help.”

“Thank you for everything.”

“Now then, next up—Oh, that was actually the last thing.”

“So it seems,” Serge said. “If anything else comes up, let’s get in touch.”

“Shall we go now, then?”

With everything confirmed, we went to the party site. “It’s pretty lively,” I noted. For the party, I set up six makeshift stands using earth magic. They were each about the size of a food stall, but they had all the tools needed for cooking. They were surrounded by my employees and neighbors, as well as strangers of all ages.

“Oh! Ryoma! Get over here!” Rick shouted to me. I saw Renny and Thor too. Rick and Renny’s family was helping us out, and they were a valuable metric by which to see how kids liked the food. “I’m hungry here! Mom says we’re eating here tonight—Ow!”

“Don’t beg, behave yourself,” Renny said. I laughed uncomfortably.

“Hello there, Boss. It’s about time,” Carme said.

“Right, let’s begin.”

“Then go greet everyone, please.”

I questioned whether it should be me who did the greeting, but I stood before the crowd as the host, a drink in one hand. “Thank you for taking time out of your day to come to our party. I’m Ryoma Takebayashi, the representative of the Bamboo Forest laundromat. Greetings,” I said. Rick stared at me impatiently. “It looks like some of you can’t wait for the food, so I’ll keep it short. As you all know, there will be a number of stalls at the founding festival, but I’d like for everyone who’s sharing the same space to be able to cooperate where possible. As a first step toward that, I wanted to hold a get-together here today. I think many of you haven’t met, so please take this chance to get acquainted with each other. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” the crowd replied in unison and raised their glasses. There were close to forty people in total, so it was pretty loud. The ones who had cooking to do left the crowd and got to work at their respective stands. The food was mostly prepared already, and they only had to take a bit of time to go through the finishing steps, so it wasn’t long before appetizing aromas wafted from the stands.

I went around checking on everyone, saying hello, and handing out ballots to vote on what we should sell. The ballots were ten pages each, where the first five pages were for voting before the meal on which dishes they wanted to try, and the other five pages were for voting after the meal on which dishes were best. The results of the vote would determine what we sold at our stall.

“Looks like this event is a success,” Prenance said as he approached with a plate in one hand, followed by a man in his fifties.

“Hello, how do you like the food?”

“It has surpassed my expectations. My troupe is over there, by the way,” he said and pointed to a corner of the site.

The party was set up so you could eat while standing like at a festival, but there were tables and chairs around if people wanted to relax. Among the crowd was a group in traveling garb who ate as they spoke to the rest of the guests. One of them in particular, a woman who chowed down on tons of food, caught my eye.

“Interested in her?” Prenance asked.

“It’s crazy how much she can eat. I was just surprised.”

“Right?” Prenance agreed with a chuckle. “That’s Maiya, the troupe’s biggest eater.”

“She became a traveling performer just so she can get good grub. That woman’s appetite knows no bounds,” the man behind Prenance grumbled.

“This is Sordio. He and Maiya are our sword dancers.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said. I had never heard of a sword dancer before. “Does that mean you put on a show using swords?”

“A number of people dance and cut things in unison. It’s not all I have to offer, but it’s not wrong to call me a sword dancer,” Sordio replied.

“He’s Maiya’s uncle, the vice leader of the troupe, and our bodyguard,” Prenance said. “Not only does he perform, but he’s a competent swordsman. Fights always break out at festivals, so if anything happens, by all means, tell us.”

“Thank you. It’s always reassuring to have more people protecting the store.”

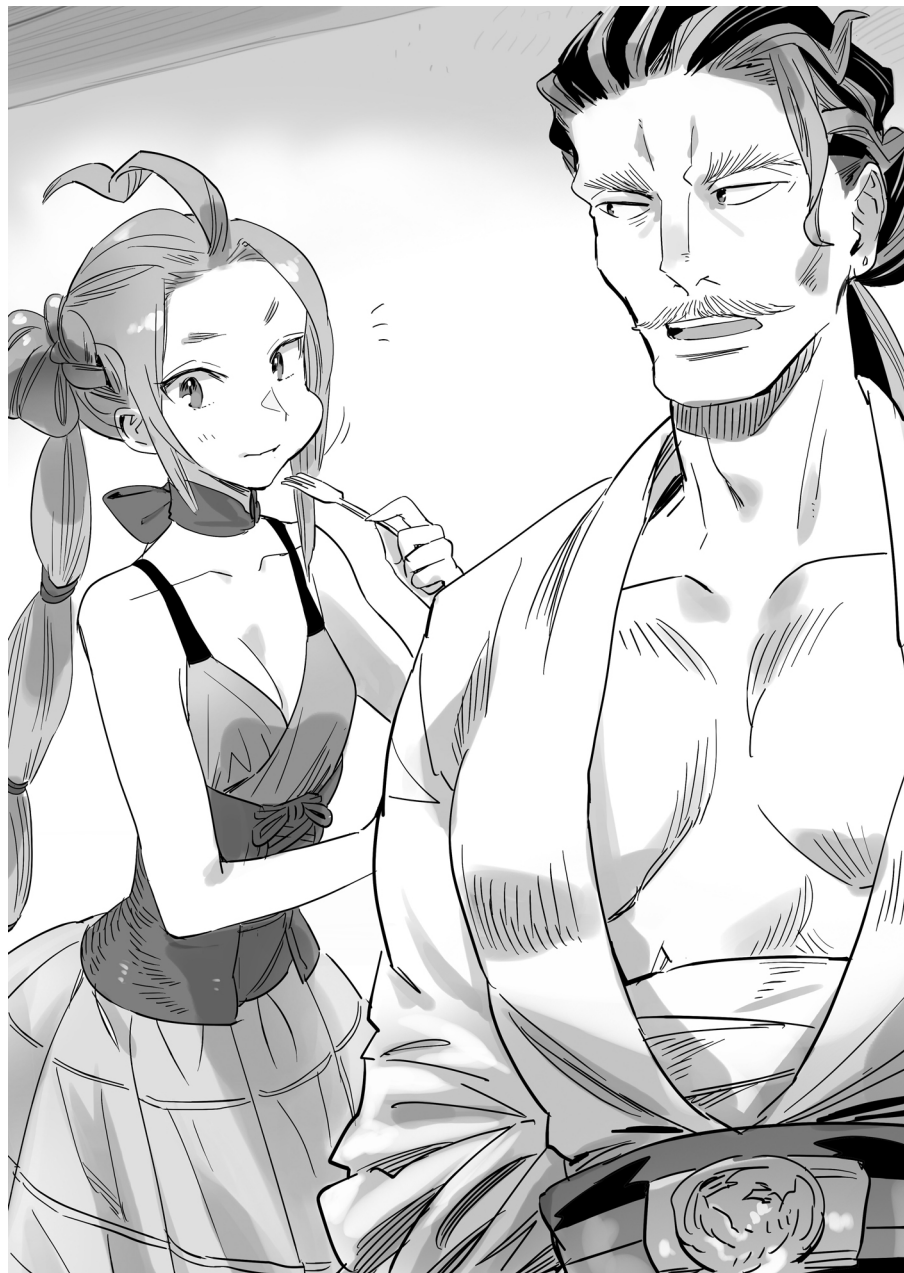
“You can call me whenever, as long as my hands are free,” Sordio offered. “You can use Maiya too if you want.”

“Use me for what, Uncle?” Maiya herself said, holding an empty plate in both hands. She was behind Sordio where I couldn’t see her.

“We were talking about helping with security.”

“Oh, you’re that representative who spoke before,” she remarked, turning to me. “I heard you were young, but I didn’t think you’d be this young.”

“That’s rude, Maiya.”



“I don’t particularly mind,” I said. “It’s true; I’m young.” I didn’t feel like being called a kid was an insult or anything. “More importantly, are you having fun?”

“Of course,” Maiya exclaimed. “There’s all this rare food, and even the more common stuff tastes better than I expected. Like this hot dog, for example. The bread’s fluffy, and the sausage is juicy. I’ve been to a whole bunch of places, and there aren’t a lot of restaurants that offer flavor like this.”

Hot dogs were standard at festivals, even in this country. But the ones at our party used bread made from the natural yeast that I taught Chelma about before, and the meat was sausages from Sieg’s butcher shop that used special seasoning to match the bread. Pauline cooked them slowly and caringly, making for a hearty meal. Their professional talent combined to make the most of the taste of the ingredients, resulting in something surprisingly juicy and delicious. This was a cut above the average hot dog. Of all the candidates, this dish was expected to come out on top.

“Also, there’s this food from Gilmar,” Maiya continued. “The soup has a nice, calming flavor, and it warms you up.”

Fay and Lilyn’s pa miang turned out to be very similar to wonton soup. The ingredients were simple, but the simmered meat and vegetables were great. The flavor was subdued, so I liked to eat it with the meat and vegetable stir fry made with semesa oil.

“Some of these are quite uncommon too,” Prenance said, his plate covered in salted and roasted dante seeds. I just bought them when I wanted dandelion coffee, but they were eaten as a delicacy in some regions. Now I wasn’t sure whether these plants were more like dandelions or sunflowers, though. The roots could be made into coffee, and oil could also be extracted from the seeds when they were being prepared as food, so I used wood magic and my scavenger slimes’ fertilizer to grow massive amounts.

“I’m glad you like it,” I said. “There’s a lot more where that came from, so eat all you want. I’d recommend saving a little room in your stomach, though. We have dessert coming later.”

“Is that true?!”

It was true. Many of the sweets were made by myself, and included sesame tofu and sesame balls.

I made the sesame tofu by grinding the semesa until the texture was pleasant to the tongue, then mixed it with potato starch, heated it over a fire, stirred until it was smooth, and cooled it in a mold until it solidified. This was covered in molasses made with muscovado.

For the sesame balls, I started by preparing some sesame paste made from semesa and muscovado. I covered the paste in dough made

from a mixture of rice flour, water, and oil extracted from dante seeds. Then I sprinkled raw semesa on top and fried the coating in dante oil.

I specifically chose not to use semesa oil for this. Its flavor was too overpowering, so it made everything taste like pure semesa. It would become impossible to make out the flavor of the other ingredients. By contrast, dante oil's flavor wasn't that noticeable, providing the ideal hint of savoriness. When I appraised it, I found that the unsaturated fat in the oil was mostly made up of oleic acid, making it a clear and nutritious oil.

However, little dante oil could be extracted from the seeds. It took fifteen grams of seeds to produce a milliliter of oil. If it took eight hundred milliliters of oil to fry something, then that required twelve whole kilograms of seeds. Dante seeds could be healthy in moderation, but making oil from them was a bit time-consuming. It was a good way to practice improving my magical energy, actually.

Thanks to all that work, I was deeply satisfied with the taste of both of these dishes, but the time it took to make them was a detriment, as was the cost of muscovado and rice flour. These could cost up to twenty sute each, a bit much for sweets from a food stall. As an alternative, I also prepared what I called 'sesame pastries' using wheat-based pastry dough to cut down on the cost. There was a good chance that those would replace the sesame balls, at least.

"I'd better eat what I can now, then," Maiya said after I told her this, then went off to grab some more food. It already looked like she had eaten enough for two or three people, but she still hadn't stopped eating.

Chapter 3 Episode 31: Rumors From the Plains

Around when the party was reaching peak activity, I heard something curious.

“Monsters on the road?” I asked.

“Yes,” Prenance said. “We came here through the southern plains, but before we left Keleban, I heard that ant monsters were sighted in the plains. I ended up being tenser than usual during my travels, and now I’m simply exhausted.” There were many types of ant monsters, but they all had hard exoskeletons and a tendency to be found in groups. Some were more dangerous than others.

“Don’t tell me they’re murder ants,” I said. Murder ants were giant, hostile, carnivorous ants with strong jaws. If they attacked as a group, they were highly threatening. Depending on the size of the ant colony, the adventurer’s guild designated them as at least C-Rank monsters.

“No, if it were murder ants, I would’ve picked another route entirely. These were tunnel ants, from what I heard.”

“I’m sorry, but can you explain what tunnel ants are?”

“Well, for one, they have the same hard exoskeleton as other ants, but their jaws, claws, and overall strength are lacking compared to other types, from what I hear. They aren’t poisonous either. Their offensive abilities are low in general, and they’re among the more gentle ant monsters, so they don’t proactively attack humans or animals. But they do have a knack for digging in soft earth, and their colonies are uniquely large. The colony itself is the problem. If any carriages unwittingly passed over it, the ground would collapse and leave them stuck inside,” Prenance explained. The colonies were fortified by the tunnel ants’ bodily fluids, so they wouldn’t break under human weight, but they couldn’t hold up a carriage full of luggage. Tunnel ants themselves weren’t that dangerous, but they were a nuisance for anyone traveling by carriage.

“That must be rough for anyone in the transportation business.”

“Hopefully they don’t impact the festival or repel any visitors,” Serge said after listening to our conversation from right next to us. He seemed concerned about them too.

“In that case, maybe I can go do something about them tomorrow.”

“You, Ryoma?” Prenance said with confusion, so I told him about my adventuring work. I also told him about my plans to go to the Sea of Trees of Syrus. “I see, and murder ants appear there?” he asked. The Sea of Trees had not only murder ants, but a number of different ant monsters, so these tunnel ants would serve as good reference material.

“I’m also worried about how they might affect the transportation of goods, so I might as well spend a day checking it out.”

“If you’re willing to do that, I would appreciate it,” Serge said.

“So would we,” Prenance agreed. “We don’t want to give the audience an unpracticed performance, and we were planning to practice in the plains a short ways from Gimul.”

Traveling performers like them had to go from city to city, so they usually didn’t have their own training grounds. Their performance was also their product, and they had to make sure it was good, so they practiced in places where they wouldn’t be seen. But the plains where they wanted to train were infested with tunnel ants. Considering the potential disasters they could cause, it was best to avoid the place. That was why they hoped I would exterminate them quickly, I guess.

“You could use my place,” I offered. If they just needed to avoid being seen, nobody ever came to my mine. The duke’s family said I could use it however I pleased, which would include using it to train for a performance. And I knew that no dangerous monsters were there. Even in the off chance that something was there, Sordio could probably handle it himself. He looked strong enough.

“Are you sure? They say that some traveling performers are thieves and kidnappers. Not that we would ever do such a thing, of course.”

“Oh, I’m not worried about that. There’s nothing valuable at my house,” I said. I kept everything of value in my Item Box, and if they just wanted to borrow the grounds, there was no problem with that. It would be more dangerous if they did enter the house, actually. I had things that could cause serious pain if they were touched the wrong way. If I left out some unfinished soap or caustic soda, that could get ugly fast. “If you really just want some space to use, I don’t see why there should be any issues.”

“Then we’d be happy to take your offer.”

“When would you like to come, then?”

“Tomorrow morning, if you don’t mind,” he requested. That didn’t leave much time at all, but if it was fine with him, I guess it was fine with me.

“Got it, then I’ll be waiting for you tomorrow morning. Just go straight north from Gimul, and I think you’ll find me.”

Thus, as we were making plans for tomorrow, the party came to

an end.



The Semroid Troupe came to visit the next day, and I provided them with a place to train. I told them which places would be dangerous to enter and left drinking water for them, then left the rest to Prenance as I left for town. I got to the adventurer's guild before noon and noticed that there were fewer people than usual. At least that meant I wouldn't have to wait as long.

"Oh, if it isn't Ryoma?" Maylene said.

"Hello, Maylene. I heard there are tunnel ants in the southern plains."

"The news reached you quickly, then. If you want to take a job, here they are," she said and pointed out the request sheets on the counter.

"So there's one request for exterminating the tunnel ants, one for searching for ant colonies, and this one about excavation? I understand the first two, but what's the excavation one about?"

"It's for digging up the colony. If there are any eggs in there, then just squashing the ants isn't going to keep more from coming. Leaving the colony intact could lead to unexpected incidents."

"I see. Is that why there aren't as many people at the guild today?"

"Right, a few colonies have already been found, and a lot of people are getting to work on those."

"How much damage have the tunnel ants done?"

"Nothing too noticeable so far. But there is one thing," Maylene said, her expression going dark. "I said that a few colonies have been found, right? I don't know if they came here to breed or what, but there's a good chance that any newly hatched tunnel ants are looking for a place to lie. I think there are still more colonies to find, and they could do some damage. That's why the adventurer's guild wants to put the most energy into searching for colonies. The tamer's guild is helping with the extermination and excavation, so those are coming along nicely."

"The tamer's guild? Can you tell me more about that?"

"There's not much more to say about it. Guilds sometimes work together on certain issues, like this one because it has to be dealt with fast. You know how this town is close to a mine? A lot of the tamers here also have powerful monsters because of that."

"I don't know if I should ask you this, but could I accept these same jobs through the tamer's guild?"

"Probably, if you preferred," she said, giving me an icy look.

"I'm actually registered with the tamer's guild too, and I owe their

guildmaster, but they've never had any jobs that I could do with my familiars. I haven't taken even a single job there."

"So you want to pay them back? That's fine, don't feel too bad about it. Whether you take jobs through us is up to you," she said with a smile. It didn't seem like I actually made her feel bad.

"Thanks, see you later, then."

"See you! Take some jobs here sometime if you feel like it."

I thanked Maylene for understanding, then left the adventurer's guild.



"Careful out there!" the gate guard said as I set foot in the southern plains. I didn't often visit the tamer's guild, so they mistook me as a new applicant at first, but I otherwise had no problems accepting the job.

"Alright, let's do this!" I shouted and sent my limour birds into the sky to fly in a V formation, so they could search for tunnel ants or colonies from above. According to the information from the tamer's guild, tunnel ants had a tendency to take the dirt they dug out from making their colonies and expel it all over their surroundings. They didn't make anything like an anthill, but if we found excavated dirt, then there was a high chance that a colony was nearby.

By sharing my senses with Eins and seeing through his eyes, I found uneven earth in part of the lush plains. It looked normal to the naked eye, but from the sky, it was apparent that something was different. If they were already excavating this colony, though, then I had no business here. The same was true of any colonies that were already being exterminated.

I used space magic to travel far from the city, where nobody was around. I opened my Dimension Home and let out my metal and iron slimes, then had them line up. There were four hundred in all. I aggressively increased their numbers in an effort to create two types of big slimes, but I ended up overfeeding and overproducing them. It only took a hundred slimes to make a big slime, but now I had two hundred of each type. But there were some advantages to having so many.

I had the slime with the highest transforming skill turn into a katana, then ordered the rest of the slimes to slowly roll across the plains. The metal orbs pushed through the dirty grass until, minutes later, they seemed to find something. Slimes are weak, but highly adept at sensing danger. That ability may not have been as strong after they evolved, but some of the iron slimes reacted to something. It seemed like they sensed something a little further ahead. They were cautious in their own way, even if that just meant coming to a stop.

I walked out in front of the slimes and carefully stepped forward. After three steps, when I was right where the iron slimes indicated, antennae popped up from out of the ground, followed by several eyes. It was an ant the size of my chest. It reminded me of a cave mantis. Before it could fully burrow out of the ground, I severed its head with the katana. Two more came out, and I slew them the same way. There were no more after that.

The tamer's guild's information said that tunnel ants were nocturnal to avoid coming out when more outside threats were present. They usually slept in their colonies during the day, aside from the guards who were stationed near the entrance. If the guards were prevented from returning to the colony, no more ants would come out. Those three ants were presumably the guards for this colony.

At any rate, that was one colony found. I wrote down the location and cast Earth Needle to create a visible landmark. My job was to find ant colonies, not to destroy them. After that, I searched around for other entrances, trying to avoid provoking the colony while I did, as I left the area. Then I went to another potential colony location.

I normally only let my slimes race around at the mine, so I decided to let them do the same in these plains as long as we were here. Both the metal and iron slimes seemed pleased. When I gave the signal, they immediately got rolling and rolling fast. I felt like these slimes had been turning into speed demons lately.

Chapter 3 Episode 32: Meddling On A Whim

“That’s a fifth one found,” I said. My limour birds found the general location of the colonies from above, and my slimes took advantage of their numbers to hunt down the colonies; I then recorded their locations. Now all that I had to do was report our findings, but this job was so easy that it left me a little unsatisfied. Finding the colonies was the whole point of the job, but I felt like I had more energy left in me, so I tried to think of a way to improve the quality of my reports.

I thought it would be nice to know the size of the colonies and the number of enemies in each, and that I could send slimes inside to investigate. But then they would encounter the ants dwelling within. If that happened, there was a high chance that the investigation could turn into a battle. Maybe I could wipe out all the ants myself, but if there were too many of them, I could actually get overwhelmed. That was especially true since tunnel ants moved around underground.

I tried to cast Investigate, but it didn’t work very well. The narrow passages of the ant colony made the flow of magical energy too complex. I couldn’t detect anything past the entrance. Thinking of it like pouring something into a mold made it clear that I would be consuming too much magical energy.

I thought about what to do for five minutes, then looked at the ground near my feet and saw a footprint I left in the dirt, which gave me an idea. I cast the Investigate spell again, but rather than making it non-elemental, I used earth energy this time. As with when I would cast Rock or Break Rock, I imagined the energy permeating through the ground.

The spell was a success. The magical energy spread through the dirt, and only through the dirt. The empty space in the search area gave me an accurate outline of the colony. The tunnel ants didn’t seem to react in any way. I hadn’t investigated the inside of the colony, so I didn’t know exactly how many enemies there were. All I knew was that it didn’t seem like I agitated them. And considering the size of the colony compared to the size of a tunnel ant, I could make a vague guess as to how many could fit inside.

I decided to make a model before I forgot the shape of the colony. Casting Rock made it easy. All that remained after that was to write

down the time of investigation, and then I was done. I decided that I should use the earth-elemental Investigate spell for the rest of them. Also, 'earth-elemental Investigate' is awkward to say, so I named this spell 'Earth Sonar.'

I led my slimes to the next area to search. There were a few to both the left and right, but I didn't know which one to go to first. Then, through Eins's eyes, I saw a group of six people pulling a small cart. Judging by their stature, they were children. Then I noticed they looked familiar, and realized that it was Beck and his friends. While they were in the middle of a break, I called over to them.

"Oh, if it isn't Ryoma?" Beck said. "We've been running into each other a lot lately. Are those slimes I see behind you?"

"We're both working in the same city, after all. And yes, these are my metal and iron slimes."

"Th-That's a lot of slimes," Wist remarked, his face tense. Maybe he was afraid of slimes.

"So, what do you want?" Beck asked.

"I'm just here looking for tunnel ant colonies. It's a job from the tamer's guild. But I happened to see you, so I wanted to say hi. Are you here for the same reason?"

"We're slaying them. Well, we're supposed to be," said Martha the half-elf.

"We're mainly after their exoskeletons," said Finia the half-dwarf.

"My bro in the slums is an apprentice to an armorsmith. If we bring him materials, we can get armor made for cheap," said Ruth the dog beastkin.

"He says it's for practice, but this'll be proper armor approved by his own boss!" his sister, Rumille, added.

"What they said. Ant exoskeletons are lighter than metal and sturdier than leather, so they can be used in armor and shields," Beck explained. "They said that we'll get a little discount if we bring a lot of materials, and we get money for all the ants we slay, too. Hopefully we can all use this chance to get our equipment up to snuff."

"Also, w-we pick herbs in these plains all the time. I want to get it back to normal already," Wist said. But I looked at their cart, and they only had one tunnel ant corpse.

"Well, you can see how well it's going."

"We just can't find any tunnel ants."

"Maybe it'd be better if we came at night."

"That's what the lady at the guild said."

"But it's dark at night, and we don't know how many there'll be."

"I-If there's a whole ton, that'd be bad too."

It sounded like they were considering the risk too. "Then, what if I told you where the ants were?" I offered.

My job was to find the colonies. I didn't need to slay any ants, but if I got close to a colony and its guards came out, I would have no choice but to defeat them. Or alternatively, I could guide Beck's party to the colonies and let them take down the guards.

"I mean, that'd help us out, by why would you do that?" Beck asked.

"Call it a whim, I guess," I said. The way that we met wasn't great, but they were trying their best. After seeing them like this so many times, I kind of wanted to offer my support. That was all the reason I needed.

"You're weird. But I'll take it," Beck replied, then told the rest of his party that break time was over. It looked like he was interested. With six new allies at my side, I got back to work.



Later, we'd just finished up the seventh colony we found since we met up. Beck's party was proactive about doing the fighting, while I stood back and kept an eye on their things. I thought they would rely on me a little more, but all I did was find the colonies. Which is to say that my familiars found the colonies, mostly, so I didn't actually do much of anything.

"Ryoma, let's make the next one the last," Beck requested.

"You're done already?"

"We've got plenty of materials. Nothing else will fit in the cart."

There were already twelve tunnel ant corpses in the cart. If they had only taken the exoskeletons, they could have fit more, but the armorsmith told them that an amateur trying to remove the exoskeletons themselves could damage the quality. I had no experience dissecting ants either, so I listened to that advice. I could also have put them in my Item Box, but in any case, leaving after this next one would be the best time to go home before sunset.

"Got it," I said, then piled the defeated ants onto the cart and got moving. We walked along at a leisurely pace.

I was surprised by the sheer number of colonies. My best guess was that the ants were in the middle of breeding season. Many types of ant monsters had an individual that served as the queen. But tunnel ants would create colonies and breed with or without a queen, and the presence of a queen only meant that they operated on a larger scale, so it was hard to judge if these ones had a queen or not.

"I think there's one around here," I said and cast Earth Sonar to confirm the location and size of the colony while the others prepared for battle. But something was off. "Beck, this might be bad."

"Is this a huge colony?"

"No, the opposite. It's the smallest one I've seen yet. There isn't

much space between the entrance and the deepest room, so you might have to deal with more than guards this time.” It was maybe a third the size of the others. That presumably meant there would be fewer ants in total too, but judging by what I had seen of Beck’s party thus far, they could only handle up to three or four ants at a time. “Should we try another colony?”

“I don’t know, I’d like to get used to fighting lots of enemies at once. Could you give us a second?” Beck’s party huddled together and shared their opinions before they got back to me. “Ryoma, we want to fight here. You never know when something like what happened before could happen again.”

At least the tunnel ants wouldn’t be able to kill them. “I’ll join in, then,” I said. If they got overwhelmed, I could handle a few.

“Are you sure?”

“I can just act as backup. That’s fine, right?”

This reminded me of my company. Whether it was my subordinates there or these young adventurers here, you could pick out any number of flaws in them if you really looked. But they were new to their job, so it was only natural. Not many people pick up all the skills they need right away. There are those rare few who can quickly learn on the job, but if you really want someone who can do their work right from the start, you’d have to hire someone with experience from another company. Newbies were always educated within the company, and over the many years I worked there, I was responsible for training them many times. Unfortunately, I was never very good at it, but I’m at least confident that I had more patience than most.

Let’s say that a competent employee could complete ten tasks in one day, and there was a new hire who could only complete one, if any. I had ten different tasks to do, and my boss also wanted the new hire to do ten tasks. I had to take care of all the tasks that the new hire failed to do, so I would end up with nineteen different tasks.

Even so, you wanted to give the new hire a task to do just to be sure they were getting something done, and when they got familiar with that, you could give them two tasks. If they couldn’t even do a single task without fail, there was no sense in giving them several, and at least nineteen tasks was less work than twenty. I just had to gradually work them toward being able to handle ten tasks. If they were lacking in some way, I could support them, if they were wrong about something, I could correct them, and if they had questions, I could answer them. It didn’t matter how long it took.

Beck’s party wasn’t that strong just yet, and they might have found it hard to find the colonies on their own. But they could kill tunnel ants once they were right in front of them. Therefore, now was

a good time to let them master fighting tunnel ants. In doing so, they could also learn how best to move and coordinate, among other things. Once they did that, they could either move on to other opponents or learn how to find the colonies themselves. To get them to that point, I wanted to make up for what they lacked for the moment. Most of those subordinates quit once they were given three tasks to do, though.

“Ryoma? Something wrong?”

“No, nothing.”

I pushed those memories aside. Beck and his friends weren't subordinates, so they didn't count. I was sure that they would be different.

As we got that cleared up, I turned another of my iron slimes into a katana and prepared for battle.

Chapter 3 Episode 33: Precocious Child

As expected, the tunnel ants deep within this last colony did come out. Including the guards, there were fifteen of them in all. I took down five of them first, leaving Beck's party with ten ants to slay. That was around double what I thought they could safely deal with, but they somehow managed to kill them all. They got bitten or knocked over a few times, but nobody was seriously injured.

"Anybody need water or healing magic?" I asked.

"No—Wait, yeah, just give me water to wash my wounds. We've got drinking water," Beck said. That was wise of him.

I used magic to fill a stone bowl with water. "Oh, and no need to all use the same water. I can prepare some for all of you."

"Huh? B-But why not reuse the same water while it's still clean? Why waste it?" Wist asked.

"You can't all wash your wounds in the same water because it'll keep getting dirtier. Even little scrapes can leave some harmful bacteria."

"What's bacteria?"

"Oh, just remember it can make you sick."

"Wist, he's offering. Just shut up and take the water," Beck said.

"O-OK then," Wist replied.

Beck washed his wounds and went to pick up the corpses, then Wist did the same. After the other four took their turns washing their wounds, I called my slimes and limour birds over and put them in my Dimension Home. Then we set off on the road back to town.

"Hey, Ryoma, how'd you get so strong?" Ruth suddenly asked on our way back.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, I remember that you beat those goblins no problem, and it was the same with these tunnel ants today."

"They couldn't even stand up to you," Finia agreed.

"It would've been faster if you killed them all yourself, for sure."

We all fought the same monsters, so that gave them a sense of just how much stronger I was than them, I guess. I had a whole lifetime of training, so the reason was obvious from my perspective, but it must have been disheartening for them when I looked to be around their age.

“Well, maybe it’s because I had a teacher,” I said. I trained under someone with proper combat techniques. I even lived with him, so I couldn’t get that far away from training. That must have played a big part, so it was a safe answer.

“Did your teacher teach you how to use two swords at once like that?”

“These aren’t just swords, these are katana. And to use two at once, I first had to learn to use one katana with one hand.”

“And doing that’ll make you stronger?” Beck asked, sincerely curious to know.

Just waving around a katana in one hand wasn’t enough. This training was partially meant to improve grip strength and overall muscle strength, but more than that, it was to prepare for a situation where only one hand was usable. Combat always comes with a risk of injury, and there’s always the chance that you’ll have to fight someone in imperfect condition. If your arm were wounded in the middle of a fight and you couldn’t swing your weapon, you would be doomed. Even if you could somewhat use the weapon still, it wouldn’t be that effective on an unharmed opponent. You would inevitably be placed at an overwhelming disadvantage. That’s why I was trained to wield a weapon with one hand. And thanks to that training, I could freely wield one katana in both hands as well. I wasn’t trained for dual-wielding specifically.

Of course, I had to learn some basic skills before I could even begin this training. If I couldn’t even wield one katana with both hands first, using one in one hand would have just been a mess. I thought it would be best for them to first train at a guild or wherever they could receive proper lessons. But I didn’t know for certain if Beck and his friends had a teacher or not. From what it sounded like, they learned the basics from older people in the slums, but those people were often busy, so Beck and friends usually had to train on their own. Seeking lessons from the guild was an option, but they said that their earnings from jobs would be unstable during that time.

“We have to save up money first,” Beck said.

“C-Can I ask something?” Wist requested.

“Sure, what?” I said.

“Wh-What do you think about when you fight? Uh, I was wondering if you get scared,” he asked. Wist had seemed kind of reserved in battle, like he couldn’t be aggressive with his attacks.

From what I saw of their fighting styles, Beck used his agility to keep the enemy in check with his dagger and martial arts moves. Martha supported the team with wood magic, while Ruth and Rumille suppressed enemies with their sword and spear. Finia and Wist had the most physical strength, so they landed the finishing blow with

their hammers. It seemed to be a plan they came up with for fighting the tunnel ants, and for that it was fine, but Wist didn't look proactive about attacking the enemy. It wasn't just that he was scared, but he seemed too gentle. He wouldn't use his full strength, so it took him two or three blows to finish off an ant. If he did use his full strength, it would probably only take one. But from what he asked me, it sounded like he was self-aware about this.

"You're always such a chicken. All you have to do is hit stuff hard, like I always tell you," Beck said.

"Yeah, but when the enemy's right in front of me, I just can't do it," Wist responded. It didn't sound like this was the first time they were having this discussion.

"I don't really think of anything," I answered.

"What?"

"When I fight, I fight. I just focus on my actions and the actions of my opponent," I said. By training and improving, you also gain confidence. Maybe telling him this would only make him blame himself for this problem, but I felt no fear when confronting the tunnel ants. "If you want to reach that point, you'll just have to train and gain more combat experience until you do."

It was a harmless opinion to have. Maybe someone could have gotten the point across better, but I didn't have the communication skills to do that. He went out of his way to ask me this question, so I felt bad that I didn't have a better answer.

"Don't blame yourself, Ryoma! The adults say the same thing."

"Hm? What do they say?"

"Oh, not—"

"They say that Wist's not cut out to be an adventurer," Beck interjected, making Wist go silent. It sounded like he was right on the money.

"Who says that?" I asked.

"Other kids. We're not the only kids from the slums that do adventuring work."

"Anyone can become an adventurer, and it's easier to find employment if you've done some adventuring work in the past."

"You always have to be careful when you're from the slums. It's safer out there when you can call yourself an ex-adventurer."

"Since it gives you proof that you've taken work seriously in the past."

After Beck, the girls in the party jumped in to comment. Next to them, Wist slumped his shoulders. Ruth seemed to be consoling him, though.

"Do you not get along with these other kids?" I asked Beck.

"Don't know if I'd say that, but the other kids are good at fighting."

They've been making more money lately, and they started making fun of people who just take jobs picking herbs. It's especially bad for Wist since he's huge and tough, but his personality gets in the way. I tell Wist that he doesn't have to hesitate all the time. He's not them, and he doesn't have to be like them! And besides, they're not so tough. Not compared to you, anyway," Beck said. I forgot that kids could have such rocky relationships.

"But if I stay an adventurer for long enough, I might have to kill someone," Wist cried.

"That's a long way off for all of us, though!" Beck argued.

"But remember what you told me, Beck?"

"What?!"

"I need to learn to attack better."

"Stupid! I didn't mean it the way they mean it," Beck shouted. He was getting a little too heated.

"Hold on a second," I said, interrupting before they got too worked up. "There's no use arguing here."

I wanted them to calm down a little, so we took a walk as they told me about their problems more clearly. Here's what I found. The other kids told Wist the things that he was saying a moment ago.

Like Beck said, those kids probably didn't have any real experience with killing people either, but they often talked about such topics anyway.

Even so, if they stayed as adventurers for long enough, there was a chance that they would have to clash with other people someday.

Wist had a sincere desire to come into his own as soon as possible so he could be more helpful to his allies.

Beck thought that they could just look at things in the long term, and planned to stick with Wist until he got where he wanted to be.

Wist was aware of his problems, but despite his timidity, he had a desire to improve. He was so frantic about it that he sort of seemed to spin his wheels. Beck was evidently aware of this, but thought it was better to laugh it off and not worry about it, so he didn't understand what was worrying Wist so much. It was complicated.

"Now that I've heard both your opinions, I do feel like Wist is overthinking things a bit," I said.



“Right?” Beck agreed.

“Darn,” Wist sighed.

“Wait, I’m not finished. Yes, there’s no need to worry so much right now. But it’s important to think about the future, and it’s important that you have some resistance to harming other living beings.”

“So which is it, then?” Beck asked.

“I mean, these aren’t mutually exclusive things. For example, let’s say you’re in town, and you’re hungry. What do you do?”

“Get something to eat, obviously,” Beck answered without a second thought.

“And what if you have no food on hand?”

“Go to the store.”

“Y-You could go to a restaurant.”

“That’s too expensive. Leaving town to gather plants to eat would be way cheaper.”

“You could trade with your neighbors for something.”

Now more of the kids were offering their opinions.

“You could also harvest crops if you had a farm, or if you were willing to be more unscrupulous, you could also steal.”

“Stealing is wrong,” all six of them said in unison.

“You tried to walk off with prey that was tossed aside before, though.”

“Ack.”

“Y-Yes, well...”

When I pointed that out, they suddenly looked ashamed. Maybe I was messing with them a bit too much.

“I’m not criticizing you or anything. It looks like you feel bad about it, and I don’t think much of it anymore. Let’s get back on topic. Yes, stealing is wrong, but it’s an option. What I’m trying to say is that any given objective has multiple approaches. I’m saying that even that question I asked of Beck and Wist has more answers than what they gave me. They have a very narrow perspective.”

“Th-Then what do you do when you fight monsters, Ryoma?” Wist asked.

“I take their life only when necessary.”

If it was for food, for clothes, or for work, I had to kill them. If I was attacked, whether by monsters or humans, then I could be forced to kill in self-defense. There was never any other excuse to kill.

“This is a rough way to say it, but if you have concerns that interfere with your skills, they’re just going to get in the way during a fight,” I continued.

Whether a bug or a human, a life is a life. Treat bugs as you

would a human in times of peace, and cut down humans as you would wipe away bugs in times of war. When a moment's hesitation can end your life, doing away with your concerns will improve your chance of survival. This was my family's motto for generations, and I don't think it's wrong. Not that I think of humans and bugs as equals, but in a fight, I would attack them with equal fury. I had largely discarded my resistance to harming humans, I think.

"But not wanting to harm living beings is perfectly normal, and I think it's a valuable feeling to have," I said. "I declare that Wist's attitude is the right one to have as a human being. He doesn't need to give up his resistance right away, but hopefully he can find some compromise that helps him accept what he has to do in the future."

Wist nodded awkwardly. Maybe my argument was a little more extreme than it needed to be. The reaction from the kids was lethargic. I didn't have a precise answer for them myself, though. The important thing was that they could come to terms with doing violence for themselves.

"So, to achieve that goal... Beck!"

"Me?!"

"Well, and this goes for the rest of you too, but how about you just chill out and talk things out sometimes? Don't let yourselves get worked up. It doesn't matter what those other adventurers say, just do what you can. Wist, you'll stick with being an adventurer for the time being one way or another, right?"

"Y-Yeah! Fighting scares me, but it hasn't even been a year yet, and I want to keep doing stuff with my friends."

"Then just take your time to think about it. Based on what I've seen today, I don't think you should get too hurt as long as you don't do anything reckless."

No matter what conclusion he came to in the end, I had no intention of objecting. If he wanted to quit adventuring, maybe I could invite him to work at my store. I didn't want to say that yet, though.

Just then, we arrived at the gate. I presented my guild card so I could pass through.

"Are you on your way to the adventurer's guild?" I asked Beck.

"Yeah, gotta report back."

"I'm reporting to the tamer's guild, so this is goodbye for now."

"Got it. Thanks for everything today."

"Th-Thanks for the help," said Wist.

"You're a lifesaver," said Finia.

After each of the kids thanked me and we parted ways, I headed to the tamer's guild on my own.

I felt like I'd done something out of character for me. Looking back on what I had just said, I didn't understand why I had said it. I

wanted to give them my support, but I didn't need to give them advice like that. I was new to this too, so that was kind of arrogant of me. It even felt like I was lecturing them.

"Boss!"

"Oh, if it isn't Fina and Lilyn. What are you doing here?"

"We're shopping," Lilyn said.

"All of this practice cooking over the last several days used up all our seasoning. We also needed more paper and consumable goods. Why are you here, Boss?" Fina asked.

"I just got back from work, actually."

"Did something happen? It looked like you were thinking hard about something," Lilyn said.

"Did I?"

"Yes, you did," Fina agreed. "Is something bothering you?"

"Not really. I just feel like I'm getting old."

"Uh, what?" they said. It looked like they were deeply confused.

Chapter 3 Episode 34: Point Of View

After I finished giving my report and returned home, I heard some lovely music. The Semroid Troupe was still in the middle of practice. Trying not to interrupt, I snuck toward the sound. After a few minutes, I found a nice patch of grass that gave me a good view of the troupe, so I hid there and watched.

Maiya and Sordio were currently up to practice their sword dance. Sordio had an ornamental round shield and longsword. Maiya had two longswords identical to Sordio's, and she danced around with them as if in combat. Prenance stood outside the line that marked the edge of the stage, along with some musicians who were playing the music. As the dancing grew more intense, so did the melody. But when the two dancers drew apart and glared at each other, the song became forebodingly quiet. And as their blades clashed, magic was used to produce special effects like sparks flying from the blades. There was no spoken dialogue at all, but it was like watching a story unfold.

I had only watched a bit of their practice before this, when I left home in the morning and lent them the space. But they were probably just warming up then, judging by the passion they were displaying now. It was breathtaking, so I didn't want to get in the way.

When the music finally reached its climax, Maiya swung her sword at Sordio's neck, stopping just before it hit. He had been wearing a decorative cape, but now, it was torn from his neck. Sordio collapsed to the ground at the same time, so it looked as if his neck had been sliced. Then the instruments thrummed, and the show came to an end. A few seconds after their job was done, it looked like they had all settled down, so I stood up and applauded.

"Ryoma, when did you get here?" Sordio asked.

"I'm sorry, I've actually been watching for a while. When I got home, I happened to hear your music," I said, unsure if it was wrong of me to watch without permission.

"That's fine, but I had no idea you were there."

"You kind of surprised us," Maiya chimed in.

"In a sense, it's our job to be watched. I take pride in my ability to notice watching eyes, but this time my senses failed me," Prenance said. "How were the plains, by the way?"

"Well, not great, it seems."

When I reported to the guild, I heard that they were getting

constant reports on new colonies beyond just the ones I found. They wanted continued help with locating colonies for the foreseeable future, and they were proactive about requesting aid from everyone who came to the reception desk.

“If they’re not dealt with quickly, the ants might obstruct travelers and negatively impact the festival, so I’ll be working on that conundrum for a while,” I said. “If you don’t have any problems with practicing here, you’re free to keep using this space in the following days.”

“Thank you, we’d love to,” Prenance answered and bowed, followed by the rest of his troupe. After that, they got all their tools together and returned to town. It looked like the sword dance was the end of their show.

I saw them off and then got to training myself. For a brief moment, I tried imitating the way that they danced, but it didn’t work out so well. When I tried to use magic, I felt my movements grow stiff and awkward. Maybe those magic special effects would actually be a good way to practice using magic and weapons at the same time. When it came to using magic and weapons in conjunction, they could do it more smoothly than me.



A day passed.

“You want to know about our magic special effects?”

“Are you interested in becoming a sword dancer?”

When the troupe came to practice, I asked the two sword dancers directly. “When I saw your performance yesterday, I thought it’d be interesting to learn your techniques,” I said.

“I wouldn’t mind teaching you, but why?” Sordio asked, so I told him how I felt yesterday. My fighting style primarily revolved around using weapons and martial arts for close combat. I could use magic as well, but didn’t often use it in battle, so I was inexperienced with it. I also told them that I wanted to expand my skill set. “In other words, you want to see if you can use offensive magic the way we use our special effects magic?”

“Yes. I’d very much like to learn, if you have the time.”

“I don’t see why not,” Maiya said.

“I suppose so,” Sordio agreed. “We can teach you a little bit without taking too much time. We don’t use the same weapons, so it may not be exactly the same for you, however. Do you still want to learn from us anyway?”

“Yes, of course!”

“Then, can you make it back here around the same time you did yesterday? I’m sure you have work to do today yourself, so we can

teach you after our practice is done.”

“Thank you!” I said. I was worried they might say it was a secret technique, but they were surprisingly willing to teach me. “Will I need to bring anything special?”

“Just your weapon is fine. We can just test your skills today,” Sordio answered.

“Oh, and make sure you have some magical energy left over,” Maiya added.

“Got it. I’ll see you tonight, then.”

“Good luck out there!”



Before I knew it, night had fallen. The excitement I’d felt since the morning helped me to find twice as many ant colonies as yesterday before I went home. When I got back as promised, the troupe members were gathering their things together.

“Sorry I’m late. Did I keep you?” I asked.

“We’ve only just finished ourselves,” Sordio said. “Let’s prepare right away. Maiya!”

“Gotcha!” Maiya shouted and came out from behind the troupe’s cart. She was holding some kind of package. “Here, this is for you, Ryoma.”

“What’s this, firewood?” I asked. It looked like a tiny log. The wood had been chopped down to a small enough size that it could be carried in one hand.

“We’re gonna start as soon as we’re finished cleaning up, so just give us a minute!”

“Hey, wait,” I said, but she had already left.

“You can let them take care of it themselves; no need to help,” Sordio told me. Watching how the troupe worked, it did look like they had the flow of this cleanup process down pretty well. My unpracticed help would probably only get in their way. “Before practice, take a look at this. This is one of the swords we use in our dances.”

I once again couldn’t help but notice how many little ornaments the sword had, but now that I was looking from up close, I also saw a strange pattern. It looked like it was painted onto the surface.

“This is paint made from processed rainbow slug fluid. It can store the light it touches and save a bit for later use.”

It didn’t glow in exactly the same way, but it was like a sort of fluorescent paint that used magic. When light magic shined upon it, light rushed through the painted lines. When these swords struck another sword or a shield in the right way, it looked to the audience like sparks were flying. But to actually achieve that required swift control over one’s own magic in the middle of a fight.

“And to accomplish this, you need some degree of mastery over the magic and swordsmanship,” Sordio said. “So the first thing I’d like to do today is test your skills. Once I have those results, I’ll decide upon the best way to teach you.”

“Thank you.”

“Hey! We’re ready!” Maiya announced, so we headed to the training area she set up. The rest of the troupe stood in a circle around it.

“What are you all standing around for?” I asked them.

“We’re going to help out a bit.”

“That’s half of it, but we’re also just curious to see how it goes.”

“I see. Thanks for the help,” I said.

“Then point your weapon at Maiya,” Sordio said. I readied my iron slime katana. “She’s going to toss that firewood at you. Slice it.” Chopping thrown objects in midair was one part of the sword dancers’ show, and it seemed that it was one step toward learning to exchange blows with others. This would be a test of my abilities. “You can chop the wood in whatever manner you’re able, but try your best to cut through the center.”

“Got it. I’m ready!”

“Here goes nothing!” Maiya shouted and lobbed a piece of wood at me. As this was only the first one, she didn’t throw it that fast. It softly arced through the air, and when it came into range, I cut it in half. “Oh, you did it? Awesome! Here’s some more!”

I chopped through the next one in the same way, then she threw another one over. They came faster and faster, the intervals between throws constantly shrinking. But I managed to handle them all. The firewood was running out.

“Last one!” Maiya announced.

“Got it!”

When I chopped the final log, the test came to an end. Curious about my performance, I looked to Sordio. He had a conflicted look on his face. “Let’s move on,” he said, and the rest of the troupe helped pick up all the chopped firewood. Sordio distributed it to everyone aside from myself. Then they painted the top and bottom of Sordio and Maiya’s pieces with red paint. This time I had to dodge the pieces thrown by the rest of the troupe while only chopping the pieces thrown by Sordio and Maiya.



As soon as I said I was ready, Sordio tossed the first piece. When I cut it in half, more and more wood came flying from all around. There were usually one or two logs thrown at once, three at most. I dodged those as I sliced Sordio and Maiya's logs.

They threw wood from one fixed location at first, but then they silently nodded at each other, picked up their pieces, and began to move around. They ran outside the circle formed by the rest of the troupe, then tossed wood at me from between the other members. Not only that, but Sordio matched everyone else's timing to make his pieces harder to cut, and threw them from awkward positions as well, so it was kind of frustrating. I needed enough focus to watch Sordio and Maiya while dodging the other logs, enough decisiveness to promptly chop the correct pieces, and enough skill to put this all into action.

"How did I do?" I asked after the test was over.

"I can't complain about your swordsmanship," Sordio said.

"Yep, you were great!" Maiya agreed. "Why do you need magic when you can do this, though?" We were surrounded by diced-up firewood. Even I was satisfied with the results of the test, but apparently I was so good that it prompted this question from Maiya. To be honest, this wasn't a skill that I ever needed before, but it was something that could help in the future. "You must just love to learn stuff."

"You'd do well to work as hard as he does," Sordio said.

"Otherwise he might surpass you in no time."

"I'm already pretty sure that he'd beat me in a sword fight, though."

After that conversation ended, we proceeded to the magic test. This just involved me using magic like normal, rather than anything special. But they did have something interesting to tell me.

"Silent incantations?" I asked.

"Yes, you can cast magic without saying a word," Sordio said.

"Sword dancers need to be able to set the mood through their expressions, you see. By casting spells without chanting incantations, we don't have to move our mouths."

"Well, it really depends on what school of sword dancing you're coming from," Maiya explained. "Some sword dancers wear masks to hide their mouths, and some even use incantations during the show and make it part of the performance itself. You can also have your sword turned into a magic item specifically for sword dancing. That's actually the most popular method."

"It's heresy," Sordio said with a scoff. "Back in the day, sword dancers enchanted their audience with excellent swordsmanship and

magic alone. Nowadays it's all masks and magic items with these people. They depend on simple tools for their magic, and they know nothing of swordsmanship beyond the basic stances. This is why sword dancers are seen as mere performers who couldn't fight to save their lives."

"Uh-huh, yeah, I know. I was just telling him, yeesh," Maiya grumbled. I didn't know exactly how long ago 'back in the day' was according to Sordio, but it sounded like maintaining old traditions was important to him. "Well, anyway, do your best!"

"Okay, thanks!" I said. This was a prime opportunity, so I wanted to learn all the skills I could.

Chapter 3 Episode 35: The Founding Festival Day 1, Part 1

It was the day of the Founding Festival, about two weeks since I started learning from the sword dancers. According to Sordio, my swordsmanship was adequate, but I needed more experience with using magic in combat. After receiving that advice, I was taught how to work on my magic mastery and focus on moving while using magic. This involved prioritizing speed over power when casting spells, but also casting them continuously at regular intervals. Two weeks wasn't nearly enough time to fully master these skills, but I was told that my accuracy and my movements when activating spells were improving. Having some instructors certainly helped me make progress.

For my basic training each morning, I adopted something similar to the test we did with the firewood, but using my metal and iron slimes instead. Balls of metal flew at me at high speeds from all directions, giving me some good practice with blocking and dodging attacks. Thankfully these slimes were pretty sturdy, and I knew how to physically enhance myself. Otherwise, this would have been extremely dangerous for both of us. But it went fine. The slimes also seemed to be using this opportunity for their own offensive practice, and I even saw one exterminate a cave mantis that sneaked in from somewhere yesterday. They defeated intruders a few times in the past, but now they seemed to recognize that crashing into their foes was an effective means of attack. It seemed like they would be capable guards for the mines now, so I planned to continue training them as time went on.

Thanks to the guild's efforts to ensure that the roads were safe, the tunnel ants in the plains were prevented from doing harm to the city or travelers. They caused a bit of a stir, but enough people and familiars were thrown at them to exterminate them all. Thanks to that, the city was receiving a steady stream of visitors, and it started to really feel like a merry festival was underway.

One morning during this time, an excited crowd gathered in the store.

"Good morning!" I said to greet them.

"Good morning, Ryoma," Pauline replied. "How would you like one of these for breakfast?"

"Thank you, Pauline," I said and accepted a hot dog while I was performing the final checks on our tools and our own breakfast.

“Ryoma, you can come on over here if you like,” Sieg the butcher offered.

“Thank you, Sieg.”

“No problem. I have to say, this place has changed a lot.”

It certainly had. What had once been an empty lot now had a number of things lined up. First, the side of the lot facing the road was now set up as an entrance, and in the middle of the opposite side, there was the Semroid Troupe’s stage. Some members of the troupe had the skills to set up the stage, and thanks to their leadership and the materials they procured from somewhere, they set it up in no time. I was still busy with exterminating the tunnel ants at the time, so I didn’t see it, but I think they finished in a couple days.

In front of the stage, there were lines of chairs and tables. There was plenty of space between them, and they looked somewhat unevenly arranged, but they were arranged as Prenance intended. The idea was to make it easy to see the stage while also allowing audience members to move around without too much trouble.

To the left of the stage, near my store, there were food stands. To the right, the Morgan Trading Company had their stands in place. It was like a food court at a department store. Some extra space was also left open behind these stands. On the Morgan Trading Company’s side, there was storage space. On my store’s side, a route was left open for transporting goods. It was right next to the stage, but divided from it by a curtain and a stone wall. Further off in the corner, public restrooms were put in place for audience members and passers-by to use freely. Of course, I made full use of my slimes and the products from my store. In any case, we had prepared in every way possible.

All that remained was to wait until the festival began. It was supposed to start at 8 a.m. Some stands were already open on the main street, but we planned to open at the official starting time. On this first day, it was mainly Sieg, Pauline, and the employees from their butcher shop and their wives that were running our stands. My employees and I would be running things tomorrow.

“Is it time?”

“I think so.”

Chatting made time fly by. I needed to make sure I was ready for opening time, so I decided to eat quickly.

“Thanks for helping out today, everyone. I’ll be back this afternoon,” I said.

“Leave it to us!”

“Enjoy yourself, Ryoma.”

I wasn’t a customer, and I wasn’t working, so I would have only gotten in the way if I stuck around. I said my goodbyes and left the store. I heard the shouts of the men and their wives behind me as I left

for town.



I wandered around town for a few minutes until I heard the church bells ring.

“Oh, is it starting?” I asked myself. It had already somewhat begun anyway, but now it was official. The crowd’s zeal grew, as did the noise coming from the streets. It was like all their pent-up energy was now free to be unleashed. Decorated with colorful cloth and flowers, the streets looked bright too.

I pondered where to go first. I had already eaten breakfast, so I wanted to check out the food later. But that was difficult to do when I was surrounded by it, and the managers at each stand kept yelling at me.

“Welcome, welcome! Our hamburgers are to die for!”

“We’ve been going from town to town for thirty years! These fries are legendary!”

“Popcorn, get your popcorn here! Delicious popcorn!”

A lot of the food brought back memories. Judging by the names and appearances of this food, they were presumably brought to this world by people from Earth.

“Excuse me, can I get some fries, please?” I asked.

“Sure thing, kid! That’ll be five sute!”

I was so nostalgic for French fries that I couldn’t help but buy some.

“Here. Five sute, exact change.”

“Thank you, come again!”

In exchange for the money, I received a container made from a big, rolled up leaf. It was stuffed with fragrant fried potatoes. I ate a piece, and it tasted just like a plain-old French fry. The faint taste of salt filled my mouth.

“It’s good.”

“Right?”

It was exactly what I expected it to be. Satisfied, I kept eating until there were none left. I almost wanted more, but I decided that was enough. If I didn’t, I could have just stood there eating French fries all day.

“Oh? Hold on a moment,” someone called out to me from a store I passed by.

“Ah, hello there.”

It was the old man from a drug store I frequented. Rather than interact with customers, he usually sat in a chair by the wall and watched the store, but today he seemed to be selling something.

“You come here often, don’t you? Here, take one.”

“Thank you. Is this candy?”

I received a stick with a round lump on the end. It was like a candy apple without the apple, but it was awfully powdery and colorful. The old man confirmed that it was supposed to be candy. The instant I put it in my mouth, though, I got goosebumps.

“What the heck?”

The old man cackled and said, “It’s especially good on hot days.”

It was so bitter and sour that it gave me chills, along with being somewhat salty. After tasting it some more, I found that it contained a few medicinal herbs that had anti-heat effects. The salt made it seem like it was also used for combating heatstroke. Ignoring the flavor, it was like some salt candy that could be found in Japan. Maybe it actually would be good on hot days.

“I’ll be selling some here tomorrow too. Come back and buy some more if you like it,” the old man said. It wasn’t totally intolerable, so I considered it.

I thanked the old man, then kept walking. As I looked around, I noticed that people were using this festival to sell all kinds of things. Fruit was one thing, but there were also vegetables, and I couldn’t see anyone buying those at a festival. There were also pots and kitchen knives on sale, and I doubted anyone was buying those. They were fun to look at, so maybe that was good enough.

Next I found some toys, and then I came across a shooting gallery. It used a pretty nice bow and arrows.

“Hey kid, wanna give it a shot?” the manager asked.

“Thank you, but I’ll try it some other time.”

I didn’t want any of the prizes out of what I could see, so I left. Next, I arrived at the center of town. All the streets led here, so this area was especially decorative. There were also many street performers here.

“Four, five, six!” a juggler counted off as he juggled more and more balls.

“There!” an acrobat shouted as he posed on an unstable stack of chairs.

It seemed more or less the same as the middle of a festival would have been back on Earth. The food and performances didn’t interest me as much as the magic items and monsters being utilized. A man was balancing on top of a monster resembling a giant armadillo that was rolled up in a ball. I didn’t know if it was him or the monster that was supposed to be the star of this show.

Then I saw someone in a familiar, but slightly out-of-place outfit among the crowd. It was a lone nun. She didn’t fit in with the noisy atmosphere at all. The pedestrians and the young people running the stands seemed curious about her as well. It looked like something was

bothering her. But what really drew my attention was a sign at the stand next to her that said ‘Color Slime.’

“Good morning, Bell,” I said as I approached her. She vigorously turned around.

“Oh, Takebayashi, good morning,” she cheerily greeted me in return. Behind her, there was a big box containing a colorful slime. Seeing them together, I was reminded of how she asked me for slime-raising tips before. She hadn’t said anything to me about it since.

“Did you decide to get a slime as a pet?” I asked.

“Yes. After we talked, I asked the children if they would like one, and they said yes. Then I spent a lot of time studying taming magic and learning the spell for forming contracts up until last week.”

“I see, so why are you here today?”

“Well, I have a bit of a problem, you see.”

We went somewhere else to avoid getting in the way of business operations before I asked for more details. It seemed that she decided to be responsible for raising the slime, and she was also put in charge of obtaining one. But to do that, she was undecided as to whether she should ask the guild to capture one for her or buy the slime at the stand she found.

“If I buy one from this store, it will be cheaper than asking the guild. But compared to the slimes I’ve seen at the tamer’s guild, this one doesn’t seem very healthy.”

“Oh, I think you’re right.”

Curious, I approached the color slime. For one thing, it was definitely a lesser class of slime. Most likely, it was just a regular slime that had been fed colored water. The illness that Bell noticed was probably caused by that coloring.

“Slimes often change color after taking something into their body, but only in the brief time up until that material is digested,” I explained. “But slimes have an easier time digesting some things than others. That stand probably used some sort of dye that’s difficult to digest so it would stay colored for a long time.”

Judging by the faint, unique scent I smelled, they probably used mizurina grass. It could be made into green dye, but its peculiar odor also made it useful as insect repellent. This grass was high in fiber and difficult to digest. It was also somewhat functional as a pesticide, which weakened the slime and made it take even longer to digest the material.

“Is that so?” Bell asked.

Ever since I discovered the method for evolving slimes, mizurina grass was one of the types of grass that I held back on feeding them unless the slimes expressed some desire for it. The only ones who ever wanted any, by the way, were poison slimes.

“Well, a human eating it would just feel a little uncomfortable unless they had a weak stomach. It’s used in clothes too, so I wouldn’t say it’s dangerous. But your slime is going to be touched by a lot of children, so I personally wouldn’t recommend taking this one,” I said. It was unlikely, but if this slime evolved into a poison slime, it could be a bit hazardous. “Would you like me to get a slime for you? I frequently go outside town adventuring. In fact, I commute from outside town every day.”

“You would do that for me?”

I happily accepted the task. The church had done a lot for me, and it would continue to in the future. It could only help if I remained in high standing with them. Clergy had more than a little influence in this society. Not to mention, this was a fine opportunity to spread the gospel of slimes.

“Hm?” I murmured.

“Is something wrong?”

“Look over there.”

On one corner of the road, there stood a child with a grim expression. Judging from their furry, dangling ears, I knew the child was a beastkin. Their gender was hard to figure out from their appearance. They looked a little young to be walking around on their own, but there were no parents in sight.

“Mom! Mom!” The child cried.

“This doesn’t look good.”

“They must be lost.”

Bell ran off before she even finished talking, and I followed after her.

Chapter 3 Episode 36: The Founding Festival Day 1, Part 2

“Fay, one lee miang and one vegetable stir fry, please,” I said.

“Boss, what’s wrong? You look a little tired.”

“Well, I’ve been through a lot.”

After we found the lost kid, Bell and I looked for their parents for a while to no avail, then brought the child to the guard station. But then, a new problem arose. The kid refused to leave Bell’s side. Bell was used to dealing with kids, so she managed to get them to calm down at first, but it didn’t last. I never knew kids could wail so loudly. To make matters worse, all of the guards at the station were like me, in that they had no kids of their own and had no idea what to do. In the end, I had to let Bell take care of the kids while I just placated things by buying food for them.

After a while, though, she looked at the clock and started to panic. The church was running a rummage sale to sell dolls made by the kids and goods donated by the neighborhood, and her shift was coming up soon. But she couldn’t leave this child unattended, and didn’t feel that it was safe to leave them with us. So I ended up working her shift at the rummage sale instead.

“Why did you do that?” Fay asked.

“She said I just had to tell them where she was, but I figured I’d help out a little bit. They got busy as soon as I started to help, for some reason, and some annoying customers showed up.”

Most of the customers were polite while they shopped, but some weren’t. Not only that, but thanks to the festival, some had gotten way too drunk. They sang the praises of Tekun as they tried to enter the chapel, despite it being closed. This wasn’t a bachelor party, so I wished they would have shown a little more restraint towards the bottle.

Most of the clerks at the rummage sale were children that the church took care of. There were adult volunteers and guards present, of course, but for various reasons, there weren’t always enough adults around. I looked like a child, so they saw me as someone who needed to be looked after as well, but the young women volunteering here would have trouble confronting these burly drunks if they didn’t have experience in doing so.

The volunteers and guards were trying to do the sensible thing,

and I didn't want them to lose face, so I kept an eye on the drunks as I stood on the front line with the kids and served the customers. Sometimes I ran to their storage to get more goods, then came back to serve more customers. And when worst came to worst, I leapt into action and subdued the drunks.

But there were children present, so I avoided doing anything too violent. Even if the drunks were a nuisance, I couldn't treat them the same way as the criminals who attacked my laundromat. To be honest, I was so overly cautious that it took longer to deal with them than it usually would. I'd lived a mostly stress-free life since I came to this world, but this was exhausting in a way I hadn't felt in quite some time. Maybe this was some indication that I'd been slacking off lately. I was reminded of how I felt back in my days as an office worker, and it was definitely reaffirmation for me that I didn't want to end up there again.

"In any case, good work," Fay said. "Here's your lee miang and vegetable stir fry. Enjoy!"

"Thank you."

With all that done, it was time to eat. I handed over some money and got a tray of plates in return, then left to find somewhere to sit. The Semroid Troupe was periodically performing on the stage, so there were quite a number of customers coming to the food court. I couldn't find a seat as easily as I could that morning.

"Master Ryoma!" Someone called out to me.

"Oh, Serge!"

I saw Serge raising his hand. He was eating at one of the regular tables with everyone else.

"If you need a seat, there's one right here," he said.

"Thank you." I took Serge's offer and sat next to him. "You're eating too, Serge?"

"Yes, I wanted to check the quality of our food stands, and the food happens to be quite good, thankfully. Most of the workers are eating here too."

"That's good to hear. It looks like business is booming on your side too." I saw a lot of customers at the Morgan Trading Company's stands as well.

"Indeed, we've been getting an endless stream of customers. We did set up where people were going to gather, but more importantly—Oh, perfect timing. Look over there."

I looked where Serge directed me to and saw a customer arguing with a clerk. A music box sat between them.

"Come on, I'm only asking for one more," the customer said.

"I'm sorry, but only three per customer for the time being."

"You can stretch the rules a little, can't you? I want to give one to

my daughter, my son, my brother, and his wife.”

“Sir, if I may ask, how many times have you come to this stand?”

“Huh? This is my first time here.”

“Are you sure? I remember seeing you at least twice before.”

“Maybe you’re imagining things.”

“I’m not so sure.”

The customer paused for a few seconds. “Fine, never mind.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

The customer left the music box and hurried away.

“What was that about?” I asked Serge.

“He most likely intends to resell music boxes. Right around when they went on sale, they drew the attention of men of his ilk. We’ve put a limit on the number of music boxes per customer to prevent anyone from buying them all up, but a number of people have been buying music boxes, waiting a while, and coming back to buy more again.”

“Won’t that cause some problems?”

“I wouldn’t worry about it. I have a lot of employees on duty to ensure these bad actors don’t get in the way of regular customers’ purchases, and I came up with a plan for when someone tries to resell the music boxes. If resellers spread news of the existence of music boxes, we can use that to our advantage and expand the market.” Serge didn’t elaborate on that because the crowd around us might hear, but he sounded confident.

“So everything’s going according to plan, then?”

“Yes, and I’ve opened a department specifically focused on music boxes. I’m also having Dinome’s workshop ramp up production. They’re very much on board with this venture, and they’ve hired many more craftsmen to assist them.”

“From where?”

“Dinome’s magic item workshop isn’t the only one in Keleban. For one, he’s receiving help from a trusted acquaintance he’s known for ages. On top of that, he bought up some workshops that were struggling financially.”

“That sounds like it’d be chaos for the workers at those workshops.”

“Everything from their workshops to their apprentices have been transferred to him directly, so their jobs and chain of command haven’t changed in any meaningful way. It wasn’t terribly chaotic. Dinome’s workshop has successfully organized for mass production and reduced the average workload for their employees for now. By sharing the work on music boxes with other workshops, they’ve stabilized their operations. And when it comes to sales and financing, we will work with them.”

The agreement between me and Dinome was to have him credited

as the creator of the music boxes. If he wanted to hire more craftsmen and merge with other workshops, it wasn't my place to argue. The agreement benefited both of us, so I couldn't complain.

"Also, I think his purchase of these workshops will prove beneficial to you, Master Ryoma. Dinome's own workshop dealt only in fire, water, light, and non-elemental magic items. But the craftsmen from these other workshops should be able to work with other elements as well," Serge said. It sounded like that could be of some use to me if I took advantage of my agreement with Dinome. "I expect that he'll contact you asking if there's anything you want soon enough."

"Then I'll have to come up with something. Maybe I'll have them manufacture some other new product."

I could give them ideas for new magic items, and those ideas could give birth to new ideas. I would probably run out of material after a while, but this seemed like it could serve as an endless loop for a while. Serge seemed to have the same idea, as he was silently grinning.

I was done eating before I knew it. "Oh? Done already? That was fast," Serge said.

"I'm an adventurer, after all."

Taking too long would have wasted my lunch break, so you had to eat fast or not at all. Talking while quickly eating was a crucial skill I cultivated as an office worker on Earth.

"I think I'll go buy some drinks," I said. "Do you want anything, Serge?"

"May I ask for some of that barley tea?"

"Got it."

I ordered two cold cups of barley tea at our food stand, then returned.

"I'm back. Here you go."

"Thank you. I do quite like this tea. It's fragrant in a way that black tea and herbal tea aren't."

"I'm glad it's to your liking."

"By the way," Serge said and looked at my food stand. "You're selling quite a number of rare foods."

Now that he mentioned it, that was true. We were selling the following:

Water
Fruit Juice
Barley Tea
Lee Miang
Vegetable Stir Fry

Dante Seeds Sesame Pastries Hot Dogs

The water, juice, and barley tea were things we just already had on hand and decided to sell; the other five products were put on there based on a vote.

As far as which of these were particularly rare, for a start, there's the barley tea. The black tea and herbal tea that Serge mentioned were the most commonplace varieties in this country, whereas barley tea was nowhere to be seen. Maybe it could be found somewhere, the way that dandelion coffee could, but it wasn't common, in any case.

Next, there was the lee miang. Due to the danger and cost of travel, trips abroad couldn't be taken as easily in this world as on Earth. Aside from people in a select few occupations, foreign food was viewed as unusual by most of the population. Fay and Lilyn's home country of Gilmar also happened to be especially chaotic, and had few diplomatic relations with any other nation, so that made lee miang even rarer. A lot of customers seemed to order it simply out of curiosity.

Dante seeds were apparently a delicacy that was only eaten in certain regions, and sesame pastries were rare as well. That meant that half of our products were seen as rare and fascinating by the general public. That's thanks in large part to deciding what to sell democratically.

"Everyone is tired of the typical festival fare, I'm sure," Serge speculated. "From what I can see, many of the customers are indeed ordering the four rare items."

Looking around, that seemed to be the case. I listened in on what the customers were saying.

"Huh, so this is what food in Gilmar is like."

"Putting pasta in soup is a pretty exotic idea."

"Yeowch, it's hot. But it goes great with this cold barley tea!"

"I never knew that semesa could be made into jam like this."

From what I could hear, the customers approved.

"What are you doing this afternoon, by the way?" Serge asked.

"I was going to make statues for the stage."

During my lessons from Sordio, I had many opportunities to mingle with the rest of the Semroid Troupe. One time I brought up how I could make ice statues, and that greatly piqued their curiosity. After I showed them what I could do, it seemed to inspire Prenance and the chief of stage construction. The following day, they showed me a proposal for decorating their stage with ice statues, to my surprise.

The Semroid Troupe was planning to put on a visually spectacular show centered around their sword dancers and acrobats before nightfall, and they wanted the ice statues for that show by the end of the day. The shows at night would be more focused on music, and they wanted to use the ice statues to set the mood.

“We’ll be using some spare magic items for the lighting to make it look like the statues glow,” I said to Serge.

“I received a report of this from a subordinate. Sounds like it’ll be quite the show.”

“The plan is to unveil them tonight, but I don’t know whether people will have the chance to give them a good look.”

“That’s a good point. It would be hard for anyone to take their time here, from the look of it. Not that I can complain about all the business.”

We had a merry chat until our cups were empty.

Chapter 3 Episode 37: The Founding Festival Day 1, Part 3

“There, that should do it.”

I was in my store’s break room, which was being kept as cold as a freezer by using a barrier and ice magic. I stared at the ice statues lined up before me. I didn’t see any problems with them, but just to be safe, I called Prenance over.

“Prenance, the ice statues are done. Can you take a look at them, please?” I asked him.

When I visited the room in our employee lodging that was currently in use as a dressing room for the troupe, he was wearing a white robe that was open in the front with embroidery made of gold thread on his chest. It was a relatively simple outfit. Any filth that got on his clothes would stand out, but there wasn’t a single stain. He was a handsome, silver-haired man regardless of his outfit, but that combined with these clothes gave him a mysterious image.

“They’re over here,” I said.

Prenance gasped when he saw them. The room was frigid to make sure the statues didn’t melt, but he didn’t mind the cold at all. He looked at the statues from many angles. “A pair of birds, a plate of fruit, a running beast, and my harp. All exactly as I requested,” he noted.

Tonight’s show was to be centered around a fearsome beast that’s defeated and subjugated by a traveler. The statues were meant to fit the story. The stands for the statues were made of wood. Those were provided by the troupe so they could carry the statues to the stage and easily set them up.

“So they’ll be set up as planned?” I asked

“Yes, we’ll bring them over after the next show. I’m sorry we asked so much of you on such short notice.”

“It’s fine. Anything to make the show better.”

Prenance chuckled. “We’ll have to put on a show great enough to not be overshadowed by these decorations.” He confidently smiled as he checked the statues, then headed back to the dressing room. After that, I left and went to the food stand.

“Hello, everyone. Do you need help with anything?” I asked.

“Boss, please wash the dishes for the lee miang!”



“Got it!”

The leaves we were using to wrap the food were commonplace in this country and often used at food stands, but they didn’t work for soup. Instead, we had wooden bowls for the lee miang. The husband of Mary, one of the housewives helping us out, was a woodworker who was generous enough to make some for us. After the customers finished eating, they returned the bowls to our stand to be cleaned.

“I’ll handle the dishes and the trash!”

“Gotcha!”

I picked up the bags of trash and dishes and entered the laundromat. These were only sorted into bags at the food stand itself since we had professional cleaners in here.

“Here’s some work for you!” I said to my cleaner slimes. This wasn’t the sort of product they usually dealt with, but they were ever vigilant. After I left the garbage with the scavenger slimes in the basement and came back, the plates were all clean.

Then I carried them back to the food stand. The dishes and silverware were already sorted, so I just had to place them in their designated racks.

“Next set, please!”

“Okay!”

But there were tons of customers buying our food, so the used dishes kept piling up.

“This is kind of nuts.”

As I repeatedly ran back and forth cleaning dishes, the line of customers seemed to extend a bit.

“Carme! Should I get this line in order?!” I asked.

“Yes! Please do!”

Carme’s clothes and hair were usually neat and tidy, but because of the heat and the nonstop work, he’d taken off his coat and tied his disheveled hair back with a bandanna. Now he looked like the sort of guy you’d see working any food stand. I never thought I’d see him like that, but we were just that busy.

“Master Ryoma!”

“Oh, Serge. Hello again.”

“You seem busy. Some of my employees are free, if you’d like some assistance.”

“Thanks!”

Thankfully, Serge lent us some extra helpers. With their assistance, we set up some ropes to keep the line organized.

“There you are, Boss!”

“Yes?! What is it?”

“Someone just went to the bathroom and said there’s almost no

water left in the toilet.”

“No water in the toilet?! Alright! I’ll fix it right away!”

I told our helpers the situation, then left for a bit.

“Excuse me, I’m the manager here. I need to get in here, sorry.”

Thankfully, it looked like the toilet could be fixed in no time. In fact, it didn’t look broken at all. There was no sewer here, so instead I had set it up so water in a storage tank would flow into a big container inside the toilet. By removing the water in the container with a bucket, clean water would pour in to replace it, but the container was currently only half full of water. The problem was just that the storage tank ran out of water. Opening the bathroom to the public presumably made the water run out quickly. I hurried to the tank and used water magic to fill it up until water began to come out.

Now the water was fixed, but then I noticed that the soap in the bathroom had been stolen. I had put it in a net made of sticky slime string and tied it down with a cord the same way I did for the bucket, but someone went out of their way to cut the cord with a bladed weapon so they could take the soap. I made the cord, net, and soap myself, so they were all pretty much free for me, but I figured I should still report this to the authorities. That just gave me yet another problem to take care of.

For now, I replaced the soap, went back to the store to let a cleaner slime clean me up, then got back to work. I wanted to make a more durable cord and net tomorrow, but if the net were much tougher than the old one, it would hurt to use the soap inside it.

“You there!”

“Me?”

While I was thinking about what to do about the soap, a mean-looking middle-aged woman called out to stop me.

“Do you work at a store around here?” she asked.

“Yes, why?”

“This kid entered the lot by himself.” She stepped to the side and revealed a young boy behind her. I had a feeling that I knew what he did. “Seems like he picked up some scent and ended up wandering away from his parents. Sorry, but can you call the guards?”

“Yes, right away. Wait here, if you don’t mind.”

I told Carme about the situation, got them some free barley tea, then ran to the guard station. Festivals and similar events are fun, but the more popular they are, the more hectic they get for everyone working there.



Then night came. After 8 p.m., our business hours for the first day came to an end. The excitement at the festival had yet to cool off for

some men who were planning to go bar hopping, but most of the women and children were returning home. Most of the customers were gone, leaving just a few people running to us for the final orders. All my employees looked relieved as they cleaned up afterward.

As for me, I was calculating the profits that day and deciding how to divide it up with Sieg, the representative of the butcher store, and Pauline, the representative of the housewives.

“So this is the total profit from today, and this is the cost of all the materials used. Subtracting that cost from the total profit and calculating rewards from that, everyone should get 312 sute. Does that sound good?”

“Sounds right to me.”

“That’s a tidy profit. Everyone should be happy about this.”

No individual item we sold was that expensive, but the housewives helped to keep the cost of materials to a minimum, and we ended up selling a ton of food, so profits were higher than anticipated. Everyone who helped was getting paid three days’ worth of living expenses.

“Thank you for all the help, everyone.”

“No need to thank us,” Pauline said. “We’re getting a reward, after all.”

“When my boys get this money, some of them might want to make this their real job instead,” Sieg said. They both laughed.

“I have to say, that was a crazy amount of people.”

“Sure was. Well, you had shows and Morgan’s new products all in one place.”

“There was a lot to draw people’s attention, and it was probably a good place to take a break, too.”

I had high expectations for tomorrow as well.

“Now, let’s divvy up all this money and go home. Can’t leave those kids unattended.”

“See you tomorrow. I’ll pop in during the break.”

“Okay, thanks.”

They left the room. After saying our goodbyes, I also headed home myself. When I went outside, I found the Semroid Troupe next to the stage. They were all together, but I didn’t hear any conversation, so I wondered what they were doing. They were all just silently looking in the same direction. They were facing away from me, so whatever they were looking at was behind them from my perspective, but it was like they were all mentally in sync. It seemed best that I stayed out of their way, so I waited for a few minutes. Eventually, without warning, they stopped.

“Good work today, everyone.”

“Th-Thank you!”

Maybe I startled them when I showed up. The young man in the back of their group seemed jumpy.

“Ryoma, did you need something?” Prenance asked.

“I was going to say goodbye before I headed home. Were you in the middle of something?”

“We were praying. Look,” Maiya said, pointing to what they were looking at. It was a masked statue covered in many colorful cloths. Each cloth was about the size of a handkerchief, but there were so many that the statue appeared to be wearing many layers of clothes.

“Is this a statue of a god?” I asked. I hadn’t heard of any god like this, personally.

“Not one you see every day, is he? I doubt you’d be able to tell, but this is a statue of Manoailoa.”

“Manoailoa?” That name was included in my knowledge of myths. I never met them before, but they were a god on the same level as Gain and the others I knew. “The god of wind?” I asked.

“Indeed,” Prenance said. “The great Manoailoa takes the form of the ever-present wind and watches over us. Manoailoa is also the god of travel and the performing arts, so many traveling performers worship Manoailoa.”

They would normally all pray individually, but after a big success, the full troupe would come together to pray to Manoailoa.

“What are these decorations?”

“We traveling performers never stay in one place for long. Whether the wind of spring, the wind of summer, the wind of autumn, or the wind of winter, the wind carries us from city to city. These cloths are proof of our travels.”

“So when someone new joins the troupe or we meet someone cool, or when we have a great show, or whenever else we form some great memories, we buy a single cloth in that town,” Maiya said. “We can’t buy too much new stuff while we’re traveling, so we just celebrate our travels that way before setting off on a new journey. We wrap them around the statue to thank Manoailoa for gracing us with these encounters.”

“It’s customary for traveling performers,” Sordio said. “I don’t know when this custom began, though.”

Thanks to Maiya and Sordio’s input, I understood now. There were similar methods for remembering things that people used on Earth, so maybe this was something that traveling performers came up with here generations ago. I thought about that as I watched the troupe clean up the statue.

Chapter 3 Episode 38: The Founding Festival, Day 2

A day passed.

“Can I get three cups of that barley tea stuff? And two glasses of water. It should be about this much money, right?”

“Understood!”

I had been taking orders at a food stand since morning. Since I was able to use ice magic, I was put in charge of the drinks.

“Here you are! Three orders of barley tea, and two of water.”

“Dang, that’s cold. This is nice, thanks.”

“Enjoy! Next customer, please!”

“I’d like two barley teas, please.”

I had been serving customers nonstop for hours. Soon, a familiar face came before me.

“Next—Oh, Jeff!”

“How’s it going?”

“Great, thanks.”

“Anyway, seven barley teas, please.”

“Understood.” I quickly prepared a tray of barley tea. “Are you here with friends?”

“Eh, you could call them friends. They’re people you know, actually. Look, over there.”

I looked, and they were certainly people I knew. “Oh, Beck and friends?” I said. The party of six novice adventurers had split up to order food from my food stands.

“You gave them advice the other day, right? Heard from some other adventurers.”

“Oh, I did, yes. Are you helping them?”

“Yeah, old man Worgan introduced them to me, and now I’ll be looking after them for a while.”

“I see, that’s relieving to hear. Here’s your tea.”

“Thanks, good luck to you.” Jeff paid for the tea, then met back up with Beck’s party.

I never expected that it would be Jeff who oversaw their party, but he knew what he was doing, and he was from the slums like they were. Maybe he had an easier time understanding Beck’s party than most. It was nice to know he was looking after them.

Then they left to enjoy their food, after which it seemed that they

were going to check out the rest of the festival together. Jeff watched over the excited kids as he walked off with a smile. Some time later, more familiar faces came to visit.

“Yo.”

“Welcome!”

Guildmaster Worgan of the adventurer’s guild came to the food stand, along with Tigger from the weapon shop.

“I want barley tea. What about you?”

“The same, please.”

“Understood! I never expected to see you two together, though.”

“Really? We used to be in the same party, you know.”

“Oh, you did?” That was news to me.

“This is back before we retired from adventuring.”

“Tigger always had the best eye for equipment of anyone in our party. He was also good with money, so he was in charge of the party’s finances. The job he’s got post-retirement is pretty much perfect for him.”

“I don’t know if I was that great with those things at the time. It’s more that the rest of you were so careless. You would’ve blown all the money on booze and women if not for me.”

“We were young, man. And we were adventurers, that’s just how adventurers are. Right, Ryoma?”

“I don’t know what to tell you.” I wished that Worgan wouldn’t drag me into it.

“Ignore him,” Tigger said. “And I’d recommend you don’t follow his example, as a general rule.”

“What the hell?” Worgan complained.

“Well, you two seem like pretty good friends.” I cast Freeze on the drinks. “Here you are.”

“So this is barley tea?”

“This is enough money, right?”

“Yes, thank you!”

They were about to leave with the barley tea, but then Tigger remembered something and turned around. “You haven’t been to my store lately. Is your equipment good?”

“Yes, it’s all been serviceable. I’ve been getting a lot of use out of the knife and armor I bought before.”

“That’s good, but what about a katana? You never got back to me about that.”

“Oh, right.” I whispered a summary of what had happened into his ear.

He closed his eyes. “So that’s what you came up with? Wasn’t expecting that.”

“I’m sorry, I guess.”

“If it works for you, then that’s fine. I won’t tell you how to use your familiars’ abilities. Just don’t do anything too crazy.”

“Thank you.”

Then he met back up with Worgan, and after catching their breath, they hit the town again.

“Hello.”

“Welcome!”

Next, Sister Betta came to the food stand with some children from the church in tow. It was almost noon.

“Thank you for your help yesterday. Bell very much appreciated it.”

“Oh, don’t mention it. It was the least I could do.”

The church looked after children with no relatives. Their lives were by no means luxurious, but the two nuns were willing to spend what little they had so they could enjoy the festival like the other children.

“Do you want drinks for eighteen?” I asked.

“Yes, please. Say please, children.”

“Please!” all the children said in unison, putting smiles on the faces of people around us.

“Coming right up, then.”

At the rummage sale yesterday, a kid I worked with talked about how they were going to check out the festival today. He was buying enough hot dogs for several people, and it looked like he was having some childish fun.

“Here you are. Careful, the tray’s heavy.”

“Thank you!” the children said.

“Don’t mention it. Next customer, please!”

“Howdy!”

“Meowdy! It’s been a while.”

“Have you been taking care of yourself?”

“Barley tea for four, please.”

Now Miya and Welanna’s party was here.

“Hello, everyone. I don’t think I’ve seen you anywhere recently.”

“We’ve been out of town for work.”

“Well, I’m glad you made it back in one piece. Here’s your barley tea. It’s nice and cold.”

More and more customers kept coming. I kept working, trying to find time to eat or take breaks when others could take my place. It was busy, but I could feel the public’s energy in the air, so that at least did something to keep me motivated.

Next thing I knew, it started to get dark out. The sun was setting in the distance, and it wouldn’t be visible for much longer. But even so, the hustle and bustle all around us made it seem like the festival

was just getting started.

"I'm back!" Jane said. "Boss, I can take over here. Go have dinner!"

"Thank you. Do a good job while I'm away."

I left to eat dinner quickly. I wasn't planning to eat much more than our specially made hot dogs.

"You're sticking to eating just those again?" Jane asked. It was all I ate for many of my meals, not just during the festival, but during our preparations beforehand as well. But all the same, they were delicious, I could get them for free, and most importantly, it let me get back to work as soon as possible.

Hot dogs are composed of carbohydrates and meat. I could get my share of vegetables for the day from the vegetable stir fry, so maybe that would make for a surprisingly balanced meal. The only problem I could think of was that I'd be consuming a lot of oil and salt, but it was hot during the day, and I needed to use a lot of energy, so this meal seemed good for that, maybe. Or maybe not, but it was probably fine no matter what I ate. My body was young.

The older you get, the easier it is to get trapped in that line of thinking. That's what I was always told back on Earth, at least, but my diet never caused me any problems. As such, I didn't hesitate to order four hot dogs and a vegetable stir fry. I also poured myself some barley tea, then forked over the money for my meal and went to find somewhere to sit.

I found a spot that seemed like it'd be available soon. There were four seats, and three women sitting there. As I got closer, they stood up to leave. Now I could take a seat in their place.

I took a bite out of a hot dog. First I tasted the soft bread, then the firm meat popped in my mouth and juices flowed out. That, combined with the sour ketchup, had me drooling. It was a pretty dense meal, but it went down eventually.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Prenance shouted. My seat was near the exit to the lot, but he was so loud that I heard him clearly over all the noise. Then he declared that a show was about to begin, and three dancer women came onto the stage. The band played a song as all eyes were drawn to the dancers and the audience went quiet. I saw them practice this show several times, but it was still impressive.

Maybe this is all those light novels I've read doing the talking, but when I thought about dancers, I thought of scantily clad women. But these women didn't show much skin. They wore thick one-piece dresses with lots of colorful frills. Their arms and legs were mostly hidden too, but they lightly lifted their skirts and took a springy step forward as part of the dance. Their skirts were also weighted, so the skirts billowed when they turned. That drew the men in the seats near

the stage to try and peek up the skirts, while the women in the audience gave them cold looks. Husbands who came with their children were dragged away by their wives.

“Looks like the event proved a success.”

“Yes, thank you. Wait, Guildmaster?!”

Glissela of the merchant’s guild had arrived. Taylor was behind her, along with a young man I didn’t recognize. They were both holding trays.

“What brings you here?” I asked. It was rare to see her outside of the guild.

“It’s not healthy staying inside all the time.”

“On occasions like these, we old folks walk around town together.”

“I see. Would you like to sit with me?”

“If you wouldn’t mind.”

“Thank you. Oh, sorry for making you carry those trays.”

“This is nothing, don’t worry about it.”

I had no idea who this young man was. I assumed he was from one of their guilds at first, but he didn’t come off that way.

“I’m sorry. I should have introduced myself already,” the man said. “I’m Arnold Bernhyde. Are you Mr. Ryoma Takebayashi?” Apparently he knew who I was. I decided to just give him a simple greeting in return.

He looked human, as far as I could tell. He was a skinny man in his late twenties or early thirties. He dressed as sharply as Carme, but his mean eyes and black-rimmed glasses made him look unaccommodating. I was pretty sure I had never met him before.

“Excuse me, but have we met somewhere?” I asked him to make sure.

“No, but I have heard about you from messages from above.”

“Ryoma, remember that whole mess at the government office? The chief over there got fired back then, and this is his successor.”

“Oh, right.” I’d heard that someone replaced him, but didn’t know who.

“I’ve heard rumors about you for some time now. Not only did you create a chance to eliminate some government corruption, but I believe you helped clean up the mess afterward as well. You also took a job through the guild to help protect the city, I believe,” Arnold said. He must have been talking about the tunnel ants. “You’ve significantly reduced my workload. Thanks to that, I could focus on disciplining my staff.”

“I was only doing it for personal reasons, but I’m glad I could help.”

“I hope that you’ll continue to offer us your assistance in the

future.”

It sounded like he'd been hoping to meet me for a while, but he inherited so much work that he had no time to go out and see me. But he couldn't call me to the office simply to thank me, either. He also needed to look into and expose all the embezzlement and collusion, so he avoided unnecessarily getting in contact with me. He took the job seriously, it seemed. But he was appointed for the purpose of fixing injustices, so he was probably the right type of man for the job. And it was nice that he went out of his way to not give me more trouble. As long as I got to keep living my life and running my store as I had been, I was happy to cooperate.

“Thank you for being so willing to cooperate,” Arnold said. “My position doesn't permit me to give you special treatment, but I will do my part to ensure that the law is obeyed and you are treated justly. Of course, if you do continue to contribute to our city, I will inform my superiors. Perhaps you may receive some special privileges as compensation.”

“You might as well have just said he's not getting special treatment, then,” said Glissela.

“Contributing something so great that you would receive special privileges is easier said than done,” said Taylor.

“I only mean to say that I expect great things from Ryoma,” Arnold replied.

“Sure, I guess we'll see.”

“Maybe he'll actually pull it off eventually, who knows?” Glissela said. She was looking at Serge's food stands. “Did you give him any ideas, Ryoma?”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” I said. I didn't think I could actually hide anything from her, but tried to play dumb anyway.

“By the way, Ryoma,” Taylor said.

“Yes?”

“How has life in town been for you? It's been a while since you first came here now. You must have encountered at least some inconveniences.”

“Just say whatever comes to mind. This old man doesn't see you that much, so he gets worried about you,” Glissela said.

“Well, things have certainly changed a lot since I first got here, but I really can't say I'm having any problems. If anything, the fact that I have enough money to casually go shopping now has made life pretty convenient for me in general.”

But that did give me pause to reflect on my life here thus far. I was born in Japan on Earth, then I died and ended up in this world. And after that, I went all the way from the Forest of Gana to Gimul. Now that I thought about it, I had come a long way.

From where I was sitting, I could see the employees at my store to my left, business clients to my right, a troupe that I only just met right in front of me, and the head of the local public office right at my side. And other customers who came today included Dancebell, the old man from the drug store, some housewives I met while preparing for the festival, and guild members that I met on previous jobs. I had made a lot of acquaintances, but I still didn't know if my current life was better than life in the forest. The forest had its own appeal.

"Hm, from the look on your face, it seems like you're fine," Taylor said.

"Yes, I think so."

But this life wasn't so bad. I basked in my happiness as the night grew darker.

Chapter 3 Episode 39: The Final Night

Dawn arrived after the magnificent festival, and Gimul was getting back to everyday life. Decorations remained on the streets, but I expected those to be cleared out within the next couple of days. Most of the festival stands were gone, as it seemed that their owners had left town already.

"I'm sure all the tourists are heading home now, so the southern gate must be packed," the guard at the northern gate said as I passed through. Then I headed down to the stage.

"We're reusing these parts, got it?!"

"Understood! I'll just disassemble them!"

I received orders from the Semroid Troupe's chief of large devices as I helped take the stage apart. I was pretty good at construction work, but this was a pretty different sort of experience, so I took it as a chance to learn. Simply by taking these objects apart, I could come to understand their structure to some extent.

"Excuse me, what's this screw-like pillar?" I asked.

"It's a stage device, so it'll be reused. You use it by turning that handle on the lower end, and it raises whoever or whatever's on it into the air. We didn't use it this time around, though."

"I see."

There were hidden devices that couldn't be seen from the outside, so that was pretty interesting.

"Boss."

"Dolce? What is it?"

"A guard's here to talk about the soap theft from the other day."

"Got it. Sorry, I need to go."

"Yeah, I heard. We'll be fine, do what you need to do."

"Thank you."

Dolce and I headed down the path back to the store, passing many customers on the way there. It had only been a day since all the work we had to do at the festival, but the laundromat was open as usual. I considered closing the laundromat for a day, but the housewives said their laundry was piling up after all the prep work for the festival, so I decided to leave the place open to meet the demand. To make up for it, I was planning to hold a party for everyone at night.

It seemed like I made the right decision, since the line was twenty

percent longer than it would normally be in the morning. Not only that, but Arnold was standing in line. The Founding Festival was held every year, so they had decorative cloths and flags that they reused for each occasion. Most years, somebody would sort out what needed to be thrown out and what could be washed for later use, then wash it themselves before putting it back in storage, but this year they decided to use my laundromat. They thought it would be more efficient and cost-effective, apparently. Arnold was here to test our services on his own clothes first. The results were yet to be determined, but maybe this would give us a big and unexpected client.

When I entered the reception room, there was a guard sitting on the couch. He stood up, greeted me, and got straight to business.

“Regarding the soap theft from the other day, the culprit has been caught. Is this your soap?” the guard asked, reached into a package next to him, and pulled out the net with the soap inside. Not that I didn’t appreciate everyone’s hard work in retrieving this, but I wasn’t especially expecting to get it back.

“Oh, stolen goods aren’t always found, of course,” the guard said. “The culprit in this case got caught in the act of pick-pocketing someone yesterday. When we searched the culprit’s lodging, we found this. This crime had already been reported, so we questioned the culprit about it, and they confessed.”

Lucky me. I decided to pray to Gain and the other gods for this later. The guard wanted me to sign something confirming that this was my soap, and I was taking it back. So after reading it over, I wrote my signature.

“That will be all, thank you,” the guard said with a smile, took the document, and hurried away. The guards were evidently pretty busy.

After the guard was gone, I heard Fina humming and carrying luggage into the store.

“Seems like you’re in a good mood,” I said to her.

“Ah! Boss, when did you get here?”

“Just now. The guard left.”

“Oh, right, that guard...”

“Did he intimidate you?”

“A little bit. Were you listening to me just now?”

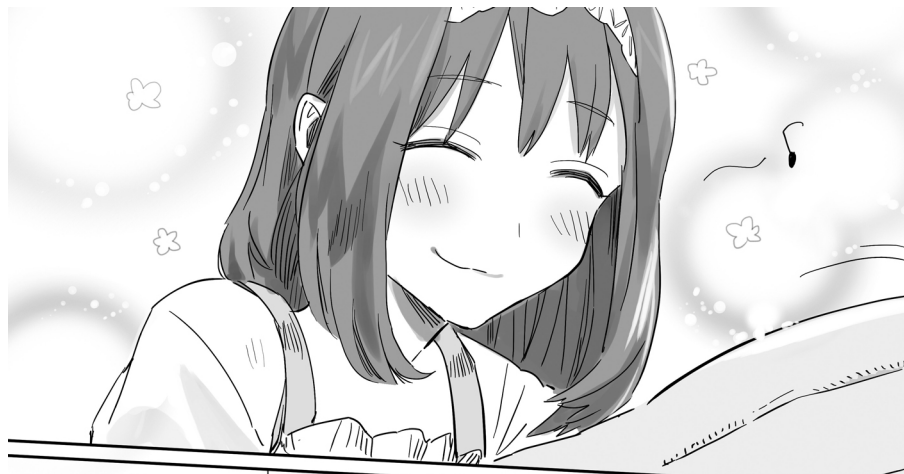
“That was Prenance’s song, wasn’t it?”

Fina blushed. Her humming sounded great, so I didn’t think she had any reason to be embarrassed. Now I was wondering if something happened between them.

“Oh, right, listen to this, Boss,” Fina said. “I was just taking orders a minute ago, and tons of customers asked if we were still selling barley tea. They loved that tea. We were never able to sell our crops,

so the fact that people like the tea made from it is kind of nice.” That was the whole reason she had to move to the city to work in the first place, after all.

“How about if you keep selling that tea, then?”



“At this store?”

“At your village. If the crops don’t sell as crops, you can manufacture them into something to sell instead.”

That was easier said than done, since it left the question of what to manufacture those crops into and whether it would sell, but now we had people asking for barley tea. That meant there was at least a little bit of demand.

As an aside, 70% of the drink sales from yesterday came from the barley tea. Some people kept coming back to buy it multiple times. Those were some remarkable results after only two days of sales, so if we had a proper avenue to sell the tea through, maybe we could create more fans.

The village would grow the crops from which to make the tea. Then it just had to be processed and sold somewhere. If nothing else, it would at least mean the village didn’t waste as much barley and give them some income. If necessary, I could also write a letter of introduction to Pioro for them. The barley tea for the festival was made by roasting barley from Fina’s village. They could presumably make it in their village as well, and if they worked with the Saionji Trading Company, it seemed like it could work out. Maybe I was getting ahead of myself, but I at least thought there was a non-zero chance.

“We’ll have to think about how much barley needs to be harvested, among other things, I’m sure,” I said.

“The village grows a few different types of crops each year in case disease spreads among one of them. Barley is thirty percent of what they grow, but they should be able to grow more starting next year. But you really wouldn’t mind if they sold it at the village?”

“I feel like I said something like this to someone before, but while I have a lot of ideas, it would take considerable work to execute them all myself. My goal right now is to prepare to return to my home village, so I don’t have time to get involved in selling barley tea.”

But there were customers asking for barley tea, and there was a village that wanted money in exchange for barley. That being the case, leaving this business in the hands of the girls’ village and the Saionji Trading Company seemed like it would be for the best. Better than waiting for me to do anything with the idea, at least.

“We discussed the idea of other girls from the village coming to work here before, but if the village turns a profit from this, some of them may decide against it,” Fina said.

“Nobody’s been hired yet anyway. It’s fine if only the ones who want to come to the city work here. If that doesn’t leave us with enough employees, I can hire from somewhere else. I would hate to

make someone work here if they didn't want to, so if some people want to stay in the village, I think that's a good thing. Best to spend time with their families while they can, after all." As long as they sent me tea leaves sometimes, I would be satisfied.

"Boss, should I send a letter to my father about this? I can have the village think about it."

"Of course, that's fine. I'll tell the Saionji Trading Company that this is something we're considering and leave it at that. We can take our time with this."

"Fina! What are you doing?!" Jane shouted.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Fina replied. We ended up talking too much on the job.

"Sorry, Jane, I was talking to her," I said. "Sorry to you too, Fina. We'll discuss this more later."

"Got it!"

I parted ways with them, then decided to get back to disassembling the stage.

That night, after the stage and the stuff from my store had been moved out of the food court, we gathered together for a party.

"I'm hungry! Mom, I want—Gwuh!"

"Shut up already."

Even the exchanges at the start of the party were much like at the last one. The celebration began with laughter everywhere.

We used food from the stands last time, but this time we had different dishes that utilized our leftover ingredients. For example, Chelma made a hearty soup full of the sausages for the hot dogs and the vegetables for the stir fry.

As for myself, I provided shio yakisoba. The noodles and vegetables came from the ingredients for the lee miang. I also used chicken soup and added some lamon juice, then seasoned it with salt and pepper to make my special broth. Then I boiled it on an iron plate I produced with alchemy, and poured the noodles and vegetables inside. Eventually, a nice aroma wafted from the pot.

"Mm, that smells good! I'll take one big helping, please!"

"Me too!"

"Got it!"

After Maiya and Rick were drawn in by the smell, more and more partygoers came up for soup. I offered some to everyone.

"Sorry I kept you! Has everyone gotten some now?"

"Still seven more to go," said Fay.

"Ten more, if you include us," said Lilyn.

"Got it! Then let's make this the last of it."

I made ten more servings of shio yakisoba, including some for Fay and Lilyn, who had been helping me out. And of course, I remembered

to make some for myself. Finally having time to eat, I looked around and wondered where to sit.

“Boss!” Carme shouted. He was with Serge and Prenance. I decided to go mingle with them.

“Welcome.”

“Come on over.”

“Let’s start with a toast. But what shall we drink?”

“Let me think about it.”

There were other children my age present, so I decided to go with barley tea.

“Good job with the festival, everyone. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” everyone said in unison.

The fragrant tea felt refreshing as it went down my throat. It was nice.

“Whew, now it really feels like the festival is over.”

“Yes, but for us, this is also the beginning,” Prenance said.

“Prenance, you’re going to a new town now, aren’t you?”

“Yes, we will be setting off for a town called Dobanan. A festival will soon be starting there.”

“Already on your way to the next festival? That sounds rough.”

“At least at this festival, everything from a place to stay to a place to perform was prepared for us in advance, so it wasn’t so bad.”

People who made their living performing had to leave one town as soon as their work was done if they wanted to make it to the next destination and secure a good location in time. And if they failed to find an inn, they were forced to sleep in their carriage.

“Wouldn’t you have been better off leaving earlier?” I asked. “You didn’t have to come to the party.”

“Don’t worry, we have time to spare. Besides, thanks to our contract with the Morgan Trading Company, we can easily get an inn and a stage now.”

“I’m having the Semroid Troupe advertise the music boxes, so I want them to secure the best location possible for their work,” Serge said. “I got in contact with my branch store in Dobanan and told them to reserve a location.”

“I see. That makes sense,” I said.

“We’ve sold out of all the music boxes we had already, so I expect good things to come of this. Speaking of expecting good things, I heard something about plans to put this barley tea on sale soon.”

“Huh? Did Fina tell you that?”

“Serge came and asked me what I thought about the demand for barley tea, and whether it’d turn a profit,” Carme answered. “I told him that you’ve given permission to sell it. Not that we know whether the village will agree to the idea, but the girls seem intent on

convincing them.”

“So how profitable do you think it’ll be, then?”

“I think it’d have to go for much cheaper than black tea, but that means more availability to the masses. Going by the sales from our food stand, it should be well worth selling. At the very least, we probably have nothing to lose. Assuming that you get the Saionji Trading Company on board, I believe this will be quite the business opportunity. But I’m no expert on the food industry.”

“I agree,” Serge said. “Knowing Pioro, I have no doubt that he’ll agree to your proposal. He isn’t a man who’d turn down a sales opportunity placed right in front of him.” Hearing that from these two was a relief.

“A drink that happened to sell in one small corner of a festival that goes on to save a village? You could write a song about that,” Prenance said, offering a different perspective. “Stories of being saved by someone or something are popular all over the world. It’d be hard to stray too far from the audience’s preferences, so we often use such subjects. But basing a story around a drink would be rather original. Could I write a tale about barley tea?”

The discussion took an unexpected turn. I wasn’t sure what to think about that request. “As long as you don’t attribute the story to me in any way, I don’t mind,” I said. “Aside from that, you should talk to Fina, Jane, and Maria about it. It’s their village that’ll be selling the tea.” I just deferred entirely to other people for that decision.

“Then I’ll make haste with that. Excuse me,” Prenance said and left the table, then immediately found the girls and began to chat with them.

“I guess he was serious. Maybe he’s drunk.”

“I don’t believe he drinks that much, though,” Serge said.

“Well, we’ll see what happens,” I said, having no clue what would happen.

“Ryoma.”

“Oh, hello, Maiya.”

“This’ll be our last night together. Want to put on a show with us?” A few members of the troupe were gathered where the stage had been. If this was going to be the last time I saw them, it seemed like a fine idea.

“Right, I’m going to go do that, if you don’t mind.”

“Good luck, Boss,” said Carme.

“I look forward to it,” said Serge.

Introduced as a new sword dancer, I unveiled the results of my training. Each time I cut the firewood in time with the music, I received applause. When one song ended, there was even louder applause. Caught up in the moment, I took out my guitar and played a

bunch of music from anime that airs on Sunday evenings and Saturday mornings. I had a merry time with the troupe, creating some final memories before we parted ways.

Chapter 4 Episode 1: Fetch Quest

A month had passed since the Founding Festival ended and the Semroid Troupe had left town. In that time, the summer heat had gradually cooled off. I caught slimes in search of one to donate to the church, and in the process, I obtained a slime that had a preference for wind-elemental magical energy and ended up evolving it.

Slowly but surely, I kept up my training. And then, exactly half a year from the day I parted with the duke's family, I stopped by the adventurer's guild and got summoned by Worgan.

"Ryoma, seems like you've been busy lately," he said. "I was worried you were gonna go off and stick with the merchant business for a while there."

"Yes, well, I'm taking everything at my own pace."

"Eh, when you've got people working for you, you're responsible for them whether you like it or not. I get it. So, as for why I called you here, will you be free for about two weeks starting next week?"

I'd made more than enough waterproof cloth, so I had no urgent business. "Sure," I said.

"Yeah? Then there's a job I'd like you to take. It's about collecting materials, and lots of them, so it'll be easiest to have someone who can use space magic go along. If you could take on the job of transporting the goods, that'd be great. Also, the area you'll need to go to has one of the monsters you want to fight."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you need to fight some treants. The materials you'll be collecting are also dropped by treants."

Treants were plant monsters that resembled trees. They would blend in with other trees in the forest and wait for a chance to attack humans or other monsters. Many of them lived in the Sea of Trees of Syrus. Their penchant for camouflage and surprise attacks made them dangerous.

"I'll explain in detail when the other members of the team are around, so if you want to know more, come to the guild around noon tomorrow. If you're still interested after that, I'll register you for the job."

"Got it, I'll see you tomorrow at noon, then."

"Great, have a good day."

With that settled, I needed to tell the others that I'd be going out.



I visited the guild at the agreed-upon time the next day. When I went to the specified room, Miya was there.

“Meow? You too, Ryoma?”

“They wanted someone who can use space magic.”

“Yeah, they want us to gather a ton of stuff. What the heck could they be using all that for?”

“Who knows?”

We chatted about random subjects until Welanna, Leipin, and Asagi arrived as well. Finally, Worgan entered the room and described the mission.

“Well, it’s pretty much like this,” he began.

To summarize his explanation, this job centered around collecting wood. We just had to slay some treants and take the wood they dropped. It would take at least three hundred treants’ worth of wood, but if we collected more than that, we’d receive a greater reward.

I didn’t know how big a treant was, and I couldn’t guess how much wood we’d get from three hundred either. But it was going to be a lot, that was for sure. I could see why they wanted me and Leipin for our space magic.

The plan was to leave town in two days. I didn’t see any problem with that, so I agreed to take the job. Looking around at the others, it seemed like they were all on board too. But after everyone had officially signed on, Welanna had a question.

“What’s all this treant wood for?” she asked Worgan.

“Oh, you know how the population of this town is decreasing, right?”

“Of course I do. One reason for that was the mine being abandoned. When there’re fewer jobs to go around, some people will just up and leave.”

“Right, and the previous boss of the public office didn’t care so much about any of that, from what it seemed. He didn’t do much of anything, but the new boss is pretty passionate about this problem. He wants to increase the population, increase the city’s income, and improve our environment. He’s got a lot of things going. This job was a suggestion from one of his staffers, something about building some big attraction in town to attract more people. But all that’s special about this town right now is the mine and iron.”

“Wouldn’t the place where the limour birds gather be a good tourist attraction?” I asked.

“That idea’s come up, but the grell frog hunt goes on around the same time, so it wouldn’t be great for tourism. We could put an end to the hunts, but then we’d lose the income from the grell frogs, so

there's no sense in that. Besides, the limour birds are only here temporarily. The public office wants something that'll be here year-round."

The idea of creating something to rejuvenate the city didn't sound that easy to me. And besides, Gimul did at least have something to sell as it was. Rather than being so particular about this or that, they could make use of the advantages the city already had. They could just have more events like the festival, for example.

"What's wrong with it being temporary? Just call it a seasonal thing," I suggested.

"There's nothing wrong with a seasonal event, but remember, this is a mining town. Once all the mines have been mined dry sometime in the future, that season will be the only time this city makes any money. We want to prepare for that day by producing something that can turn a profit year-round," Worgan explained. Now that he mentioned it, that made sense.

"Well, I do get what you're saying, though," Worgan continued. "Gimul's not in such dire straits just yet, so I agree we don't need to rush into a huge project, personally. But that's the direction things have gone in. Ultimately, they decided to construct a tourist district just past the southern gate, and the main attraction there will be an arena. There'll also be inns for the participants and the audience to stay at, and fees for watching and gambling on the fights. That's how they're planning to make money, apparently. It'll cost loads of cash to finish this project, but the profits from it should be massive."

"An arena and gambling, you say?" Asagi said. "I don't doubt that this will be profitable, but I fear that it will have a negative impact on public safety." It did seem like it would make it easier for criminals and ruffians to roam the streets.

"That's why it's all being built in a new district. The inns that the tourists and arena participants are meant to stay will all be completely separated from the old city. This part of town can be the same mining town as ever. It will be governed by the same folks as this city, but you can think of it as an entirely distinct city to the south. To maintain public safety, they'll be greatly increasing the funding for the city guards and hiring more men. The gambling will be managed by the city and thoroughly regulated. Now, this next bit is related to the answer to Welanna's question, but the planning and construction for the arena will be handled by Perdor Beckentein."

Everyone except for me was surprised. I could only guess that this person was famous. "Who's that?" I asked.

"You don't know, Ryoma?" said Leipin. "He's the second son of Viscount Beckentein. He was supposed to assist his older brother with managing their territory, but he fled from home and put his heart and

soul into architecture.”

“He’s considered the most brilliant architect alive today, but he’s almost famous for being highly eccentric,” said Welanna. It sounded like there was a lot to this guy, but it wasn’t any of my business to care.

“When he was approached about it, he said something about having a good idea in mind and took the job on the spot, apparently,” said Worgan. “But he absolutely insisted that the most important parts of the arena be constructed from treant wood. That’s why we want to start collecting treant wood now.”

It sounded like some sort of crazy artist thing. I asked if treant wood was normally used in construction, and I was told that it was possible, but it was mostly used to make staffs for magicians. Perdor Beckentein was apparently talented enough that he could make such unreasonable demands and get away with it. They called him an unparalleled genius. I thought about that until the conversation came to an end and everyone dispersed.



A couple days later, it was time for us to leave town. I used the time in between to make some preparations. Mostly, they involved moving everything in my Dimension Home to a storage room I set up in the mine, then sealing the entrance with earth magic to prevent theft.

I also tried expanding my Dimension Home the way that Sebas taught me. Each time I expanded the space, I felt like it took even more out of me. But thanks to my tons of magical energy and all my training, I managed to expand the Dimension Home to about the size of the first floor of the employee lodging at my store in Gimul. I had no idea how big a treant was, but this seemed like it would be able to fit a fair amount of wood.

I thought about this as I waited at Gimul’s southern gate. I was supposed to meet with the others, but it didn’t look like they’d arrived yet. However, I soon saw Leipin and Asagi walk toward me from a short distance away.

“Leipin, Asagi, good morning!” I greeted them.

“Morning,” said Leipin.

“Good morning, Ryoma. Are you feeling well?” said Asagi.

“I’m fine.”

Miya later met up with us as well. The guildmaster provided us with a carriage and two horses at the gate, in addition to some food for the road. Once we got all that together, our journey began. By the way, Mizelia was the coachman for the carriage.

There was nothing but the occasional tree in the plains south of

Gimul, so we got to watch the lush scenery flow by us in peace. Asagi was the leader of the team, so while we rode toward our destination, he went over the plan.

“Miya, Welanna, and I shall be the ones to defeat the treants,” he said. “Leipin and Ryoma will do the job of transporting the vanquished treants. Leipin will also search for treants and alert us about any nearby monsters, and Ryoma will attend him. Does everyone agree with this?”

I nodded to express my approval. That was the basic plan, but I intended to do at least a little fighting. Everyone knew that I joined the mission to get some practice fighting treants, so they were going to let me get some experience with that.

Leipin was an expert on monsters, so I got advice from him about treants’ weaknesses and what to watch out for in combat with them. According to him, treants attacked by swinging their branches around, so it was necessary to be wary of attacks from above. Their weak point was the face-like protrusion attached to their wooden bodies. You could heavily damage that or the surrounding area, or alternatively, chop the treant down from below the face to slay it. But our goal was to turn the treants into wood, so it was best to dispatch them while doing as little damage as possible. Some damage was likely unavoidable, but it was something to keep in mind.

And in the event that we encountered a higher rank of treant, extra precautions were required. They were slower than ordinary treants, but their branches were thicker and packed more of a punch. They could also use wood magic to extend their branches or vines for obstructive tactics, so they were a nuisance in direct combat.

Incidentally, the way to tell a treant apart from a regular tree was to sense its magical energy. They looked exactly like regular trees aside from their faces, so if a treant was at an angle where the face was out of view, they could be extremely difficult to identify. But if you had the ability to sense their abundant magical energy, they could be easily located.

And one final detail: unlike trees, treants could move from place to place. They were even slower than slimes, but they could pull their roots out of the ground and use them to crawl. It was hard to imagine a tree walking around of its own will, though. That just sounded absurd.

“So what defines a monster, anyway?” I asked, after Leipin had gone over all the necessary information.

“What do you mean?” Leipin replied.

Leipin went on to tell me that monsters were creatures which started off as either plants or animals, but mutated into something else due to magical energy. Using treants as an example, they were

ordinary trees that possessed magical energy and thus became monsters. If magical energy could cause these mutations, then there was no reason it couldn't transform trees into monsters the way it could anything else.

Speaking of which, Pauline once told me about something called magicification. That was also a phenomenon where plants were transformed by magical energy.

"Does it not affect humans?" I asked.

"Large amounts of magical energy can cause a sickness called magical energy intoxication, but it would be impossible for the human body to contain enough magical energy to trigger a mutation."

The human body had a defensive mechanism which automatically released magical energy so it would never mutate, according to Leipin. I asked about magical energy intoxication, and he told me that people who inherently possess a lot of magical energy are seldom inflicted with it.

Even regular people could only get it by using too many recovery potions or magic crystals, or by eating too much monster meat. But magical energy was mostly contained in the blood, so the flesh itself was mostly safe to eat. It would only cause mild symptoms, and it was considered rare and unlucky to become intoxicated by eating meat. People tended to joke about it and brush it off when it happened.

We continued to talk about it as we kept an eye on our surroundings, and continued forward at a leisurely pace. Leipin told me that monsters instinctively avoided attacking anyone who would pose a significant threat, so nothing around Gimul would go after a carriage full of adventurers. And just as he said, we weren't attacked even once that day.

On the road to our destination, I had a deep discussion with Leipin about monsters and slimes, heard from Mizelia about all the places she had been, and chatted with Asagi about miso and soy sauce.

"Miso soup? That brings back memories," Asagi said. "I'm surprised to hear you can get miso and soy sauce in Lenaf. Thank you for informing me."

"Should I make miso soup tonight? We have the ingredients."

"Really?! Then please do!"

Thus, I was put in charge of cooking dinner that night. Inside Leipin's Dimension Home, I produced miso soup, nikujaga, and rice. Everyone loved it, but Asagi in particular wept tears of joy when he finally got to taste miso soup again.

"Asagi, have you not returned home in a long time?" Welanna asked.

"No, the island I come from is a long way from here. Returning

home wouldn't be easy. But most importantly, the dojo where I learned swordsmanship taught that those who become skilled enough with a sword are to become adventurers, so you could almost say I was forced to leave on a journey. I can't return until I've either completed enough jobs through the adventurer's guild to reach S Rank, or I've been away from the island for fifty years."

"Fifty years? Why so long?"

"It's how long the founder of the dojo traveled the world for, I believe. It provides a way to improve one's swordsmanship and a chance to expand one's horizons. Surviving in the outside world and making it back home is both a learning opportunity and a trial. There are powerful monsters that don't exist on my island, as well as a wide variety of people, you see."

"Who protects your village? If the strong people leave for fifty years, isn't that an issue?"

"No need to worry. Only those who seek to master the blade leave the village. Some study swordsmanship for self-defense, some to defend the village, some are still training at the dojo, and some are dojo masters. Even among those who remain in the village, many are quite skilled."

We ate as we talked, then got ready to sleep in our sleeping bags in Leipin's Dimension Home. It was pretty spacious.

"Once I was away from my base for a long time to do research," Leipin said. "I needed somewhere to put my household belongings, research materials, and monster specimens, so I spent years expanding my Dimension Home. I don't spend so much time away from Gimul anymore, so now I leave most of my belongings at home, and for this job I came with even less luggage than usual."

Apparently, he found it faster and easier to expand his space than to clean the place, which sounded a bit silly to me, but the results were nothing short of remarkable. Without much luggage in the Dimension Home, it felt nice and big, easily more than double the size of my own. I hoped to make mine just as big someday.

Once my sleeping bag was ready, there was nothing left for me to do that day, so I decided to go to sleep. We went to bed early, planning to depart at sunrise.

Chapter 4 Side Story 1: Meanwhile 1

While Ryoma was having a leisurely journey in the carriage, classes were underway at the academy in the royal capital.

“Class will now begin,” the teacher said, and proceeded to read indifferently from a textbook. It was a dull and repetitive class. The students listened in silence. One of those students was Eliaria. She sat up straight, looked right at the podium where the teacher stood, and listened to the lecture. But on the inside, she found it tedious to endure.



When class ended that morning, Eliaria left her seat and hurried to the magic training ground in one corner of the schoolhouse. Students could practice there independently, but it was seldom used outside of classes. In other words, it wasn't a popular spot. Eliaria sat on a bench off to the side of the training ground, ate the lunch she had prepared in advance, and killed time by practicing magic until lunch break was over. After class that afternoon, she would return to her room in the dorms. She had already been at the academy for about a month, and this was the routine she'd settled into.

Eliaria stopped casting magic and sighed. “I've only been here for a month, but I don't know how much more boredom I can take,” she thought to herself. “I never expected classes to be quite this tedious.”

This academy taught about culture and various fundamentals for first-years through third-years, then taught more specific knowledge and skills for the fourth-years through sixth-years. After graduation, graduates could become disciples or enter training courses for whichever field they wished to pursue.

Eliaria had only just enrolled, so her classes taught the most fundamental of the fundamentals. They provided basic lessons about national history, geography, math, magic, and swordsmanship for the purpose of physical education. If they were all nobles, then the first-years' classes taught the students nothing that they wouldn't have learned before enrolling.

As such, Eliaria found the classes too simple. Her grades were good, but she felt no sense of accomplishment. Not only that, but none of the forty or so other students in the class ever talked to her. This wasn't because they were trying to ignore her or bully her, of course,

but because they were intimidated. She was from the duke's family and possessed high magical energy, so they were scared to associate with her more than necessary.

Elia was aware that she was being avoided, so she didn't go out of her way to try and speak with them either. Some of the students would likely have personalities that were incompatible with her anyway, but she didn't want to force anyone else to talk with her either. Even if they were afraid of her, they would be unable to reject her approaches, and Elia didn't want to form relationships that way. As a result, she made no friends throughout her first month at the academy. Her time there was spent bored and lonely.

"I knew things would be like this, even before I got here, but still..." Elia said, sighing yet again.

"What's wrong?" someone suddenly said to her.

"Huh?!" Elia gasped. She didn't know when this woman got here, but she was standing behind her. Elia turned around, and she was surprised by who she saw. "Oh, you're from Count Wildan's family." Elia bowed.

"My apologies. I'm Michelle, Count Wildan's eldest daughter. I didn't realize you were the daughter of Duke Jamil when I saw you from behind. Excuse my rudeness."

Michelle Wildan was a count's daughter, but nothing about her was especially feminine. Her hair was cut too short to reach her shoulders, and she was wearing pants meant for men alongside a shirt meant for women. She carried a big, plain black bag on her person, simply for its practicality. Her face was androgynous as well, and it wouldn't be unreasonable to assume she was cross-dressing as a man.

"You've done nothing rude," Elia said. "Our status doesn't matter here. And I've been trying not to draw attention to who I am, so I don't blame you for not knowing."

This academy purported to pay no mind to the social standing of its students, so nobles and commoners alike were supposed to wear the same uniforms. There were, however, no restrictions when it came to accessories. Many students from noble families would wear gaudy golden hair clips, armlets encrusted with jewels, and other such accessories. The extravagance of these items was how they showed off the wealth of their families.

But Elia didn't wear any flashy accessories. That meant that her uniform reflected the intended ideals of the academy, but it also meant that Michelle saw her as a commoner at first.

"Thank you," Michelle said.

"May I address you by first name, Michelle?" Elia asked with a smile. She didn't sense the same evasiveness that she did from the other students, but she wanted to test how comfortable Michelle was.

“Of course, my lady.”

“Call me Elia, please. As I said, our status doesn’t matter here.”

Michelle giggled. “Elia, then. Hopefully, you’ll ignore whatever else I say that could be offensive, then. I’m getting tired of watching my words.”

“That’s fine, of course. It’d make me happier if you spoke freely.”

“Uh-huh. So, like I asked before, is something wrong?”

“No, nothing in particular. It’s just, you know how the classes here are.”

“Oh, I know how you feel. I’m just pretending to take classes at this point. And if you don’t get involved in any of these silly cliques, you hardly have anyone to talk to during breaks either.”

“Oh, is that so? I thought you were popular, Michelle.”

“Haha, maybe back when I first enrolled. Some girls got the wrong idea from my uniform, but I just dress like this because it’s easiest. When they learned I wasn’t cross-dressing, most of them lost interest and ditched me. But it’s not like I’m that social anyway. I avoid people because they can be a bother, which as it turns out, leaves you with nobody to talk to.”

“I see. Is that why you came here?”

“No, I’m here for an experiment,” Michelle said and took a piece of paper out of her bag. A magic circle was drawn upon it in pencil.

“A magic circle? Are you an alchemist?”

Michelle went wide-eyed at that question for a moment, but then smiled her biggest smile yet. “Unfortunately not. I’m studying a subject called magic circle science.”

“Magic circle science?”

Magic circle science was an extremely minor field of study that began from alchemy circles, which would glow when magical energy was sent through them. It involved research into why magic circles reacted in that way, and whether that phenomenon could be utilized for something.

After Michelle explained this, Elia looked curiously at the magic circle on the paper. “I’ve never heard of such studies before.”

“It branched off from alchemy, and not much has ever come of it, so it’s a field of study that’s in decline. I came to this academy because I heard there was a teacher who taught magic circle science, but that teacher apparently quit last year, so I’ve been forced to study it on my own. I’ve got time on my hands anyway.”

“Is that so?”

“It sure is. Can I ask you something, Elia?”

“What?”

“You know how magic circles are often used in alchemy, right? There’s a lot of misinformation about it out there, saying that it’s not

magic circles that they need, but sketchy drugs or live sacrifices. And it seems like you don't have any distaste for alchemy," Michelle said. It sounded to Elia like she was implying something about alchemy. Worried about what Elia might think, Michelle spoke further. "I don't have anything in particular against alchemy. If anything, I'd say I'm interested in it."

"Are you?"

"Magic circle science came about from the circles used in alchemy, so I would have to have some interest in alchemy as well. There's nothing weird about that, is there? I hate all those hustlers who use alchemy to scam people, but I don't think all alchemists are scam artists. Much like with magic circle science, there are real alchemists that've been researching the subject for ages and it's just that nothing's come of it. That's what I think."

Hearing that was somewhat of a relief to Elia. "Is that so?" she said.

"If you could teach me any alchemy, I'd like that, actually."

But Elia was not an alchemist. She had some knowledge of it thanks to her relationship with Ryoma, but not enough to teach someone else. And while Elia had nothing against Michelle, she was hesitant to introduce Ryoma to somebody she just met.

"I'm sorry but I just happen to have met an alchemist before. I don't know any alchemy," Elia said, rejecting her request.

Michelle knew better than to insist any further. She gave up on asking and began to prepare for her experiment. She set the piece of paper on the floor, took some pink powder out of her bag, put it in some ink, and began to stir it.

"Michelle, what's that?"

"The ink's just regular ink. The powder is some crushed up fire-elemental and non-elemental magic crystals mixed together. Unlike the magic circles in alchemy, the ones in magic circle science can't take magical energy by themselves. You need to put magic crystal powder in ink and draw the circles with that."

"What makes it different?"

"All I know is that the elements of the magic crystals change the effects, and that the ratio of those magic crystals relative to each other changes the strength of the effects. For example, sending magical energy through a circle drawn with ink containing fire magic crystals will generate fire. The strength of that fire can differ depending on the ink mixture, so the fire can be controlled via the magic circle. I know the design of the circles isn't just arbitrary either, you have to draw particular crests inside them, but I don't know much about how that works."

"What do you mean?"

“The crest that you use changes the reaction and efficiency of the magic circle, but I don’t know which crests are most efficient. So all I can do is test a bunch of different magic circles and see which ones work best. That means I need a ton of magic crystals, which means I need funding for my research. Which is why I haven’t gotten a lot of research done.”

“I see. Why are you doing this research?”

“Because it seems interesting. Not a lot of other people are researching it, so there should be a lot to discover. So I want to be the one to discover it and do something useful with my time. And while I may be the daughter of a count, the Wildan family has been made up of researchers for generations, so my family gets it. They say I should research whatever I want to research, and they provide a decent amount of funding for me,” Michelle said. She reminded Elia of Ryoma. Then Michelle drew a magic circle with the ink and said, “I don’t know exactly what this will do, so stand back a little.”

Elia quickly distanced herself from the magic circle. Once she was far enough away, Michelle sent magical energy into the circle, making it glow red. Michelle hurried away from the magic circle, and five seconds later, a few small fireballs burst from it. They sounded like firecrackers.

“Very interesting—Hm?” Michelle said, hearing two people yelp. One was Elia, but the other was a fox girl who had just entered the training ground. “Sounds like I startled you. Sorry about that.”

“This is a training ground, loud noises are normal here,” the fox girl said. “It looks like I’m interrupting something. My apologies.”

“Oh, it’s fine. You’re Miyabi, aren’t you?”

“You’re in my class, aren’t you?” Elia asked.

“I’m honored that the daughters of Count Wildan and Duke Jamil recognize me,” Miyabi said. She tried to be somewhat more polite than usual when talking to nobles.

“There’s no need for that; we’re all equals here. Are you going to do some training, Miyabi?”

“There was actually something I wanted to tell you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, I have a message for you from an acquaintance. That’s what I’m here for today.”

Miyabi didn’t want anyone to hear that this message was from a man and start any rumors, so she spent the month waiting for a chance to speak with Elia alone. And Elia did come to the training ground alone for the past month, but on this one day, Michelle was there too. That caused Miyabi to panic a little, but she remained calm enough to reply appropriately.

“A message for me?”

“Yes. Do you know someone by the name Ryoma?”

“It’s from Ryoma?!”

Ryoma wanted to set up a chance for Elia and Miyabi to become friends, but thought that whether they become friends should be left up to them. That’s why he didn’t tell Elia anything about Miyabi. He figured that since they both knew him, they would at least have something in common to discuss either way. But at the same time, Ryoma also wanted to mess with Elia a little by surprising her.

“Sounds like you do know him,” Miyabi said.

“Yes, but how do you know about him?”

“I met him through my father, and when I told him I was going to the academy, he asked me to relay a message to you.”

“I see.”

“Is this Ryoma person someone you know, Elia?” Michelle asked.

“Yes. He’s a little strange, but he’s a friend of mine.”

“He certainly is strange; no arguments here,” Miyabi muttered.

“Huh,” Michelle said, somewhat curious to know what he was like.

“So what did Ryoma want to tell me?” Elia asked.

“That he wishes you luck. And that’s pretty much it. It sounded like he was worried about you.”

From that, Elia got a general sense of what Ryoma was thinking. He didn’t need Miyabi to send that message for him, as he could have just sent a letter to her. That meant that he remembered how she told him about her lack of friends during their last meeting in Gimul, and he deliberately created a situation where she would meet Miyabi. Elia had it all figured out.

“Thanks for the message. Miyabi, I feel like we may have been destined to meet. Would you like to be friends?”

“Are you sure? You’d be fine with calling me a friend?”

“Status means nothing here. Besides, I’d hate to spend all my time at the academy on my lonesome.”

“Well, I’m happy to be friends with you, then.”

“Mind if I join the group?” Michelle asked. “I don’t have many friends either.”

Miyabi smiled and welcomed Michelle too. Soon after they shook hands, the lunch break ended. Then they returned to their classrooms and endured their tedious afternoon classes. But maybe they would enjoy this day a little more than usual.

Chapter 4 Side Story 2: Meanwhile 2

After class the next day, the three of them went to a corner of the courtyard and chatted. There was time before lunch break ended, and they had to return to class afterward, so they wanted to take that chance to learn about each other. After some discussion, Michelle had a proposal.

“Would you two like to form a practice group with me?” she asked.

The magic and swordsmanship classes at the academy had students form groups of five or six for practice. Students tended to pick partners not only based on personality, values, and their ability to cooperate, but based on status as well. Some of the nobles hated when commoners were treated as their equals. Students invited each other to join groups, and while neither nobles nor commoners were obliged to form groups with each other, it was the best way to avoid conflict.

But students who didn’t join teams in time would end up in mixed groups, or whatever groups didn’t have enough members yet. In those cases, the statuses and desires of the students weren’t taken into account. The academy’s official stance was that everyone received an equal education, regardless of status. But it was easy to imagine that those situations could be extremely unpleasant. All one could do was pray that the students got along.

Elia and Michelle wouldn’t be treated inhospitably by anyone, but since they happened to find each other enjoyable to be around, they naturally thought it would be best to form a team right away. That was why Michelle proposed the idea, and Elia and Miyabi agreed.

“But we’ll still need another two or three members,” said Elia. “Teams have to be made up of five or six people.”

“That’s true,” said Michelle. “If we don’t find anyone, we’ll probably end up with team members who couldn’t find any other groups.”

“I don’t care who’s a noble or who’s a commoner, but can you think of anyone who’s not too twisted, and ideally someone who doesn’t care about status?” Miyabi asked.

“I can think of one.”

“Who?” Elia asked.

“Riela Clifford, Baron Clifford’s eldest daughter.”

“Baron Clifford’s daughter? I think they started off as a knight family,” Miyabi said. “But they gained noble status thanks to all their accomplishments. Generations of great knights have come from that family, right?”

“Right. Riela can be prideful and fussy about rules, but she never looks down on anyone for their status, and she’s happy to acknowledge anyone’s talents. I think she’d treat any student equally.”

“She sounds perfect,” Elia said. “Do you know her personally?”

“We used to see each other a lot. But that stopped once I became busy with studying and research, and she became busy with training.”

Thus, the three of them decided to invite Riela Clifford to their group. They headed to the swordsmanship training ground, and as soon as they got there, Michelle pointed off to the side.

“There she is. Let’s go,” she said.

Michelle led them to a girl with her hair tied back who was passionately practicing sword swings. She had a dignified air about her. The girl was tall for her age and had a beautiful face, so she stood out a lot. As a crowd of boys watched Riela from afar, Michelle approached her.

“Riela, do you have a moment?” she asked.

“Michelle? What is it? And who are they?”

“Hey, who’s this guy?” one of the boys asked.

“This dude’s got two girls with him,” another complained.

“Not only that, but he’s going after Clifford now too!” a third shouted.

“What’s he got going for him? He’s a shrimp,” a fourth said.

“He’s almost like a woman. Actually, his face is pretty girly too. You sure he’s a man?”

“Uh, err, ahem.”

“Perhaps we ought to take this somewhere else,” Michelle suggested, flashing a sardonic grin at all the impolite stares and misunderstandings swirling around her. She took Riela with her as she left the training ground. Elia and Miyabi followed them to a rest spot with few people around. They sat on the bench, where Michelle told her Riela their plans.

“I see, so you wanted to invite me, then,” Riela said. “Thank you, I’d like to join your team.”

“Really?” Elia asked.

“Thank goodness!” Michelle cried.

Elia and Michelle were elated, but Miyabi wasn’t satisfied. “Are you sure?” she asked Riela. “From what I’ve heard, you get the best grades in swordsmanship, and several other teams have invited you already.”

“Yes, but I don’t care for the people in those groups. It’s apparent

that they only want me in their team so they can raise their own grades, and many of the men look at me quite impudently as well. I also don't care for the way that many of those people look down on commoners. Arrogant nobles like them are no friends of mine."

Full of youth and passion, Riela may have still been a student, but she had the spirit of a gallant knight. Thus, Riela became part of the group, and they thought about who else they could ask.

"I can't think of anyone," Riela said. "I don't have many associates."

"Right, you've been wholly focused on swordsmanship since forever," Michelle replied.

"And you've been wholly focused on studying, haven't you? Speak for yourself."

"True. Miyabi, you should be able to help with this. You're an apprentice merchant, so you must have a lot of connections, right?"

"Not really. I've only been here for a month, and if you want someone nice who hasn't already joined a group, that doesn't leave a lot of options. Plus we're all women here, so you'd probably want any other members to be women too, right?"

"If possible, yes," Riela said. "Though I wouldn't mind a man either, if they just refrained from leering at me."

"You do have quite the figure, Riela," Elia remarked.

"It's true, we used to have about the same figure," Michelle said. "When did that change? And you're perky in all the right places."

"What are you looking at?!" Riela complained.

"Uh, no particular part of you. Your whole body, I guess."

"Stop ogling me! It's no better coming from a woman!"

"Calm down, Riela," Miyabi said. "Anyway, that doesn't leave us with a lot of candidates."

"But you still know somebody, right?" Elia asked.

"Yeah, but they'd leave our team pretty unbalanced. I can think of four possible candidates, but three of them want to be magicians. Of the four of us here, only Riela's going to be much good for close combat. If we put two of those three prospective magicians on the team, we'll have one person fighting with a sword and five fighting with magic."

"That does sound rather unbalanced."

"I don't care much about my grades anyway, but those practice fights could be dangerous," Michelle added.

"Protecting five people on my own would be taxing," Riela said. "If we were surrounded, we'd be doomed. The teachers oversee these practice fights, but we shouldn't depend on them. If possible, I'd like at least one more ally who's capable in close combat."

"Unfortunately, while the fourth candidate isn't entirely incapable

of fighting, she specializes in stealth and setting traps. She'd be best as a scout or spy," Miyabi said. "Speak of the devil, there she is now."

"Darn, I got rejected again," the girl sitting on a nearby bench said. She had short hair and dog ears, giving her a spunky look, but she was hanging her head.

"Her?" Michelle asked.

"Her name's Kanan. She's a commoner with nimble fingers, and she's good at making little crafts. She's intending to become a craftsman, apparently."

"I see. What should we do?"

"As long as she's a good person, I have no complaints," Riela said. "If she can't fight, I'll try to become strong enough to protect everyone."

"I'm fine with it as well," Elia agreed.

"Then I'll go talk to her," Miyabi said. "One second. Kanan, do you have a moment?"

"Huh?!" Kanan yelped, her head springing up. "Oh, aren't you Miyabi? Need something?"

"My practice group's looking for members, so I wanted to ask if you'd like to join."

"Really?!" Kanan immediately jumped at the opportunity and grabbed Miyabi's hand, to her surprise.

"Well, someone's enthusiastic. The rest of the team's here as well, so maybe you could talk with them a bit."

"Thanks!"

Miyabi took Kanan to the rest of the group. Kanan's eyes sparkled as she loudly introduced herself.

"I'm Kanan Schuzer! Nice to meet you!"

Recognizing her last name, Michelle was the first to respond. "Likewise. So, I'm curious about something. I've heard of a Schuzer."

The instant that Michelle mentioned her last name, Kanan frowned, so Michelle stopped before she actually asked her question, But Kanan knew what she was going to ask and answered her. "Yes, I'm the daughter of the famous magic item craftsman. But I'm no good at crafting magic items, so don't expect anything from me in that department."

"Why do you say that?"

"I'm actually a magician who specializes in enchanting magic."

"I see. That explains it."

"Sorry, but can you explain a little?" Riela asked. Michelle and Miyabi seemed to know what Kanan was talking about, but Riela and Elia didn't.

As such, Kanan began to explain enchanting magic. "It's said that long ago, enchanting magic was created by a person born with unique

characteristics. Supposedly, only people from that bloodline can use this magic. That person has so many descendants by now that there are enchanting magicians being born all over the world, but on rare occasions, someone will be born with the same unique characteristics as the creator of enchanting magic. That person will be able to specialize in enchanting magic, but won't be able to use any other type of magic. In order to enchant an item with a spell, you need to use both enchanting magic and a spell from another class of magic that you want to enchant the item with, but I can't use any spells that aren't enchanting magic, so I can't make magic items by myself."

"I see... Sorry I asked."

"It's fine! You need to know whether to let me on the team, so I had to tell you either way!" Kanan declared resolutely.

The fights that they would be engaging in weren't necessarily going to be safe, so knowing what their prospective members could or couldn't do was important. But even so, not everyone would openly talk about their faults without hesitation. Many would sidestep around the truth, and some unscrupulous types would be willing to outright lie. The fact that Kanan brought it up herself put her in a favorable light with the other four.

"I have no problems with her. What do the rest of you think?"

"She's fine with me," said Michelle.

"I'd love to have her on the team," said Elia.

"That settles it, then," said Miyabi.

Kanan's mouth was agape when she heard that. "You'll really let me join?" she asked. "I can't use offensive magic, and I'm pretty much a novice with a sword."

"Don't worry about that," said Elia.

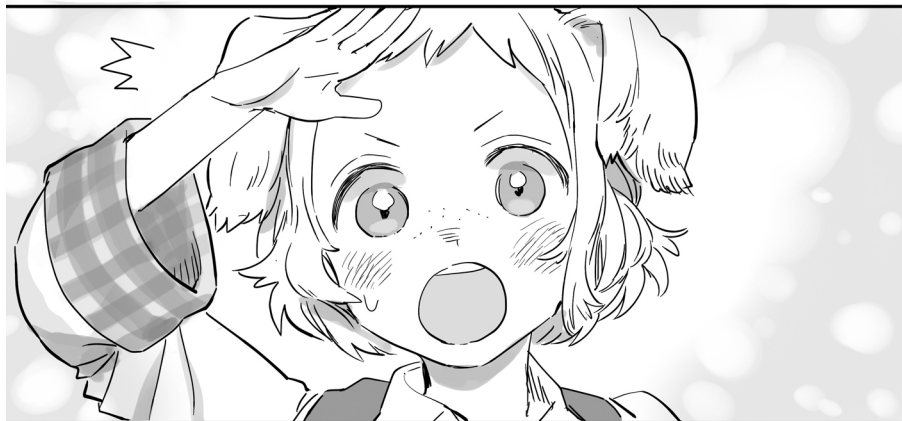
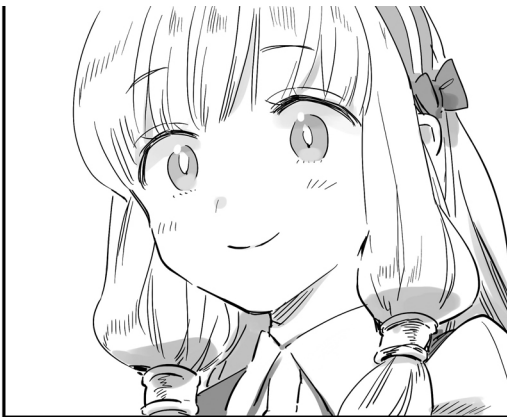
"Your abilities are only a secondary priority," said Michelle.

"If you can't fight, I'll protect you," said Riela.

"So there you have it, you're on the team," said Miyabi. "Of course, you're welcome to decline, if you'd rather not join."

"No, I want to join!" Kanan cried. "Thank you! I've been turned down by so many teams, I didn't know what I'd do! I'm so glad to be part of your group!"

On this day, Kanan avoided the possibility of having her school life ruined by getting stuck with a bad team. But three of them were nobles, and two of those nobles were the daughter of a duke and a count. This fact almost killed Kanan with shock when she heard it, but that's another story. Ultimately, they all made friends they could have a casual conversation with. Perhaps there would be arguments from time to time, but with friends like these, improvement in their school lives was a given.



Chapter 4 Episode 2: Forest Search 1

We had been riding in the carriage for three days now. My main job during that period was preparing the food, and Mizelia and Miya taught me how to handle the horses. Once we were far away from Gimul, the carriage was attacked by goblins and other monsters a few times, but Leipin's magic made quick work of them. No matter how great their numbers were, they couldn't match this party of top-rate adventurers. I was hardly needed for anything, so I found myself with plenty of time on my hands. Still, I heard that it'd be helpful if I steered the carriage, and when I asked if they could teach me how, they were happy to oblige. Thus, I got to learn a skill that I had zero experience with on Earth.

"Looks like you've pretty much got the hang of it. You should be fine after some practice." Mizelia offered her approval as she watched me from off to the side.

"Thank you, Mizelia."

But I couldn't claim to have mastered it yet. If I didn't stay in practice after this mission was done, I'd probably forget everything I learned. I considered buying a carriage after I got home, but I couldn't think of many situations where I'd need one, so that sounded like a waste of money. I'd also need to buy horses, so I had to think the whole idea through before I came to a decision.

About four hours later, it was announced that we were near the town closest to the forest. After another twenty minutes, the town gate was in sight. There were a lot of pedestrians here, so Mizelia took over steering the carriage for me.

I gazed out at the gate and the streets. This city seemed much smaller than Gimul, but still fairly lively. All of the buildings were made of wood, and we passed by several carriages packed with lumber. It seemed likely that forestry was this town's main industry.

As I was thinking about the city, we arrived at the inn. We took two rooms, one for the men and one for the women. After that, we went to the adventurer's guild to gather information about treant sightings to prepare for tomorrow.



"Is everyone ready?" Asagi asked us as we stood outside the forest the next day. After we nodded, we set foot inside the forest.

Miya and Mizelia stood at the front of the group, followed by Cilia and Welanna, then me and Leipin, and Asagi guarded us from behind. The forest was dim and gloomy. It was similar to the Forest of Gana in that regard, but also somehow different. The air was stagnant, and almost suffocating.

"I believe we have our first encounter already," Leipin said. "Miya, look. About ten meters ahead. See that one tree that's somewhat thicker than the others?"

"That one?" Miya asked, pointing at one tree.

"Yes, that one."

The trunk of the tree looked to be about thirty to forty centimeters in diameter. It was around four meters tall, and seemed to be a conifer. By appearance alone, it was nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding trees. Leipin was right; it was definitely thicker, and its branches looked longer, but those features would be practically impossible to notice at first glance.

When Leipin gave us confirmation that this was a treant, and we made sure that no other treants were in the area, Miya and Mizelia approached it with axes in hand. Since we were up against treants today, the women were wielding hatchets and small axes.

When they got close to the tree, it flailed its branches at them like whips. They nimbly dodged, but while the treant's branches looked hard, they were surprisingly flexible. One of them tried to wrap up Mizelia, but she promptly chopped the branch in half with her axe. The rest of the treant's branches drooped a bit, and the trunk slowly leaned over.

"We're good!" said Miya.

"It's dead!" said Mizelia.

They beckoned for us to come over, and when we did, we found Miya's axe lodged inside the treant. I couldn't see it from where I had been standing, but she struck it in the face. The axe was right in the middle of its forehead.

"If you just dodge the branches and land one good hit like this, you can take them down easy," said Miya.

"One treant by itself is relatively easy to beat, so if we find another one on its own, I think we can let Ryoma fight it," said Mizelia.

"Thank you," I said, then noticed that Leipin looked unsure about something. "Leipin, is something wrong?"

"We found this treant rather fast. Treants prefer the darkness deep in the forest, so it's rare to spot them so close to the forest's entrance," Leipin said. Which reminded me, nobody at the guild yesterday reported any treant sightings near the entrance either.

"Maybe there's hordes of them further inside the forest?" Mizelia

suggested.

"It's possible that one stray treant found its way here, but we must proceed with caution," Asagi said.

Keeping our guard up, we broke the branches off the slain treant. Once Leipin had stored them away in his Dimension Home, we got to walking again. Sometime later, we found another treant.

"There's one. Ryoma, give it a try," Leipin said.

"Right."

I stepped forth and drew my big iron slime katana from its big metal slime sheath. Thanks to its Harden skill, the blade was more than solid enough, and cut quite well, too. Now that I was used to transforming the slimes, I had faith that I could instantly repair any fractures the blade might suffer.

I used my magic detection to reaffirm the location of the treant, then covered my body and blade with qi and held the katana in the hasso stance. This treant was thinner than the previous one, but just as I crept into range, its branches attacked me from above. I evaded the attack by dodging to the right, and sighted the protrusions that made up the treant's weak point. I wasted no time in swinging my katana at the treant, severing the protrusions with a downward slash from the side, like one might cut off a man's face.

The treant emitted a wail the instant it took the slash, but it did me no harm. The protrusions fell against the roots below and clattered on the ground. It looked like I took down the treant in one shot. Its magical energy rapidly disappeared, and just as with the last one, its branches drooped, and its trunk slumped over.

"Looks like you did well," Leipin said.

"We need a lot more than this, though. Let's keep it up."

The most dangerous thing about treants was how they disguised themselves as trees to take people off guard. But this also meant that if you could detect a treant before entering its range, it was significantly less dangerous. In a one-on-one fight, at least, they didn't seem to pose a problem. I didn't know how that would change if we encountered several at once, but that was something we could find out later.

From then until the afternoon, we slew tons of treants. Right around when I had gotten pretty used to fighting them, we found a whole horde and exterminated them together. Then, counting our kills, we found that we had slain a stunning 147 treants. We were in an open area that people often used to rest, but it had been so thoroughly filled with treants that it seemed to be like any other part of the forest. We received no information about this yesterday, either.

"There's still plenty of time, no need to rush the job," Asagi said. "Though, I'm curious as to why there are more treants than yesterday's information suggested. The sooner the guild knows about

this, the better.”

The current state of the forest did seem quite different from what our sources said. Between the last horde of treants and the ones we slew before that, we had already killed close to two hundred of them. The goal was to kill at least three hundred, but we were already more than halfway there, so we decided to return to town early. At the guild, there was an older woman at the reception desk taking reports about the state of the forest. When we told her what we saw, she looked mystified.

“I see. Thank you,” she said. “Actually, a group just came in and told us the same thing. We were discussing the idea of sending someone to investigate.”

“Interesting,” said Leipin. “Do you have any idea what might have caused this outbreak?”

“There may be an elder treant. Treants thrive in that forest all year round, and once every several years, we hear reports about an elder treant.”

“I knew it. Do you mind if we continue to enter the forest? Are there any restrictions?”

“You’re free to enter as you wish. Shouldn’t be any problems, since you’re all either A Rank or B Rank.”

I was E Rank myself, but decided not to bring that up. It didn’t seem like the woman was going to stop me alone from entering the forest anyway. Rather, as long as we were going to the forest, she decided to show us a job posting for slaying treants.

Adventurers were allowed to accept multiple jobs at once. For example, taking multiple jobs which could be completed in the same location for more income was something any competent adventurer would do. In this case, we could both collect money for slaying the treants, and receive our payment for taking the treant wood back to Gimul. The objective of this job was to slay the treants, while the one in Gimul was centered around gathering their materials, so it wouldn’t take us any extra time. If we just hunted more treants the way we did today, we could complete both jobs. Thus, while acquiring the information we needed, we also accepted this request to slay treants.

We wouldn’t re-enter the forest until tomorrow, so we had time to kill until then. I had no plans, but I didn’t want this time to go to waste, so I entered my Dimension Home to train with my slimes. Today, my main goal was to train my poison slimes to use spears.

Close to an hour later, in the middle of training, I wondered what would happen if I gave Melzen’s spear to the poison slimes. It was just taking up space in my Item Box. I thought it might be a little heavy, but I figured that the poison slimes would be able to use it well enough. I was curious, however, as to whether the slime could utilize

its magic capabilities. I knew that slimes released magical energy when they evolved, but I still didn't know if that only happened when they evolved, or if it was something they could do all the time. I would have to test it to find out.

I called one poison slime over and tried to make it emit magical energy. It was surprisingly easy to make it do what I asked, so maybe it could use a magic weapon? I took Melzen's spear out of my Item Box, had the poison slime hold it, and commanded the slime to fill it with magical energy. Fire burst from the tip of the spear.

"Success! Can you swing it around while doing that?" I asked the poison slime.

It handled the spear admirably. It wasn't that quick with it, possibly because the spear was heavy, but it could get the job done. As it kept swinging the spear, though, it slowed down even more. It was tired and seemed to be out of magical energy, so I decided I should let it stop. But just then, the poison slime dropped the spear and started to shrivel up.

"What's wrong?!" I cried, running over to the slime. It didn't seem sick or wounded, but it was a little feeble. It had shrunk to half the size of a regular poison slime, and had grown sluggish. I decided to give it some poison magical energy and see how that helped.

The shrinking couldn't have been caused by the Minimize skill, because typical poison slimes didn't have that skill. I used Monster Appraisal on this one to be sure, but my hunch was right. With that result in mind, I considered that it might have been because I made the poison slime use magical energy. That was all I could think of, but now the question was, why would that have caused this?

Maybe its body was running out of magical energy. I couldn't be sure, but it was possible that slimes were made of magical energy. If so, that would explain why using that energy would cause them to shrink. In fact, I couldn't come up with any other possible explanation. But magical energy was invisible and intangible, unlike a slime. All the same, when a slime died, its body vanished. Assuming that slimes were made of magical energy, maybe that would explain this phenomenon, but it would only create more questions. I decided to put those questions aside for now and work based on the assumption that slimes were made of magical energy. I wanted to ask Leipin about it later.

I asked Leipin at dinner that night, but he said that he didn't know either. It never even occurred to him to give a valuable magic weapon to a slime, so he was even surprised that they could release magical energy and use magic weapons at all. He ultimately concluded that it was a possibility. Monsters contained more magical energy than ordinary animals to begin with, and there were plenty of monsters

that couldn't use magic despite that. So there was nothing unusual about slimes possessing magical energy. But if their bodies were composed of magical energy, and using it caused them to shrink, that didn't explain how earth slimes or healing slimes could use magic without shrinking. This was going to require a lot more research.



The next day, we were out hunting treants and collecting wood in the forest again. The number of treants was getting ridiculous. We took turns slaying them starting in the morning, and by noon we had collected at least six hundred treants' worth of wood in total across the two days.

"My Dimension Home is running out of space," Leipin said. "I think this should be enough for today. How about it, should we call it here?"

We had reached our goal with time to spare. Nobody had any objections, so we decided to wrap up our work for the day.

"Ryoma! Look over there!" Leipin cried as we were on our way out of the forest and pointed at the sky. Peering through the trees, I saw a small, green, floating orb. On top of it, it looked like there was fluff from a big dandelion. "It's a slime!"

"A slime?!" I exclaimed.

"It's called a fluff slime. They have the ability to fly. I don't think you have this type of slime yet."



“You’re right, I don’t. I didn’t even know about these. Can it be caught?”

“Yes, quite easily,” Leipin said, then held his hand out at the slime and cast a spell called Pickup. The slime suddenly appeared right in front of him.

“What was that spell?”

“It’s space magic for teleporting an object close to you. But it only works if the target is within your line of sight. It’s also difficult to aim properly, so there’s little use for it most of the time, but it’s good for capturing certain opponents unharmed. That’s why I use this spell to capture monsters I intend to research. I also use it for capturing grell frogs.”

“I see.” That reminded me that he mentioned using magic to capture grell frogs during the hunt. Presumably, this was that magic.

“Anyway, I would suggest making a contract with it quickly. This isn’t exactly a safe place.”

“Right.”

I hurried through the contract process with the fluff slime. It was small enough to fit in the palm of my hand. I put it in my Dimension Home, thanked the rest of the group for watching for monsters in the meantime, and then we got walking again.

We got to town before sunset. I headed straight to the inn and used Monster Appraisal on the fluff slime.

Fluff Slime

Skills: Flight (1), Growth Acceleration (5), Reduce Weight (10), Photosynthesis (3), Absorb (1), Split (8)

Thanks to photosynthesis, it didn’t need the Consume skill, presumably. The absorb skill was probably for water. This was my first time seeing the Flight, Growth Acceleration, and Reduce Weight skills, and they seemed unique. Lastly, this slime’s Split skill level was especially high. Considering the dandelion fluff, maybe it could multiply the way that dandelions did.

Seeking to test the fluff slime’s abilities, I picked it up and had it use the Reduce Weight skill. Suddenly, the slime felt weightless. It was lighter than other slimes from the start, but it still felt like it had had some weight until now. Its size hadn’t changed at all. I had to wonder how its mass could change, but in any case, it only seemed to be able to reduce its own weight. If it could have reduced the weight of other objects, that would’ve been convenient for transporting goods, so someone would surely have figured that out by now.

When it was in this lighter state, the slight breeze from just moving my arm could send it flying. This was probably thanks to the

Flight skill. It was more akin to floating, but it could adjust its altitude by changing its weight. That didn't change the fact that it was reliant on the wind, though.

I asked Leipin about it, and he told me that fluff slimes could travel long distances on the wind, so they were a type of slime that could show up anywhere. However, they seldom appeared in great numbers. Their Split skill level was high, so I wondered why that was the case. Leipin said that the dandelion fluff flew off when they multiplied, as I suspected, but also that not all of the fluff would become new fluff slimes. And when large numbers of fluff slimes did happen to appear, their fluff became a nuisance for any nearby towns, so guilds often put out requests for their extermination. I felt like I might be able to do something with fluff slimes, but decided to take some time to think about it after this job was done.

Chapter 4 Episode 3: Forest Search 2

The next way, we went hunting for treants once again. If anything distinguished this excursion from the previous ones, it was that we were now so used to fighting treants that we could take them down efficiently. At first, we thought that collecting the treant wood could take up to two weeks, but considering the rate we'd been progressing at thus far, we'd be able to finish the job either today or tomorrow, and could return to Gimul soon after.

I split a treant's face in half from its forehead to its jaw. Another treant was to its right, but I slashed diagonally upward from the bottom left of its face, besting it as well. Then I dodged a third treant's branches and chopped its face off from the side. Every time I did that, it felt like knocking a mask off a person's face. With those three treants dead, I looked around to confirm that no others were present.

"You've gotten pretty good at this, Ryoma," said Welanna.

"Your skills with a sword were always impeccable, so you're quick to adapt to your opponents, I suppose," said Asagi.

"Every move you make is flawless," said Miya.

"Thank you, everyone. My grandfather thoroughly trained me in combat, so I'm fairly confident in my abilities."

This was technically a dangerous place, but we were safe enough to have a casual conversation. It would've been a bad idea to let our guard down entirely, but we didn't want to be too tense either. When we proceeded further into the forest, however, there was a sudden change in our surroundings. I detected magical energy.

"Leipin, do you feel that?" I asked.

"Yes, There's quite a number of them. Unfortunately, I can't get an accurate reading from here. Asagi?"

"We are most likely headed towards the elder treant," Asagi said.

"I'll ensure that we have an escape route, and if we find that this battle is impossible, we'll return to town and inform the guild about it."

We remained wary of our surroundings as we proceeded, then encountered another group of treants.

"Hah!"

"Meow!"

"...!"

"Hiyah!"

“Wind Cutter!”

The ones that noticed us slowly crawled over to attack. Their numbers were overwhelming, so we had to fight as a team. The women targeted their faces with axes and hatchets, Asagi split a treant in half with his sword from the face down, and Leipin provided support with magic. I took down the treants that tried to get behind us, so we wouldn't end up being surrounded.

More and more treants crept out of the depths of the forest, with no end in sight. Thankfully, individual treants weren't that strong. The treants we killed didn't have their roots firmly in the ground because they were moving around, so they collapsed upon defeat and didn't block our vision.

“I'm not having any trouble yet, but they just keep coming!” said Cilia. Nobody responded, but I got the feeling that we all felt the same way.

“From what magical energy I'm able to sense, most of the trees around here are actually treants!” said Leipin. “Assume that we'll be chopping down all of them!”

“Don't overdo it, everyone!” said Asagi. “No shame in retreating!”

“I know!” said Mizelia.

“Live to fight another day, as they say!” said Welanna.

Despite the subject of this conversation, nobody sounded terribly serious. We just affirmed our plans, then moved right on to more treants. This was nothing to a party of A- and B-Ranks, apparently.

I kept focused on my own job. The number of treants heading toward me had increased a bit. I sheathed my katana and instead had the big metal slime which was acting as a katana split apart.

“Hm?! What are you doing?” Leipin asked.

“Just picking up the pace a little!”

I was surrounded by a hundred metal slimes. I picked up two of them and ordered them to transform into throwing axes. Then I powered myself up with qi, and threw them with wild abandon. Two treants groaned as the axes hit them cleanly in the face, and then they fell over. I wasted no time in transforming two more metal slimes into axes and tossing them as well, repeating the process to unleash a storm of axes.

Over the past couple of days, I came to notice that the magical energy in treants wasn't evenly distributed. It seemed to be that way at first, but one part of them had more magical energy than the rest. That part happened to be their face-like weak point. The face seemed to be the pivotal point from which magical energy was delivered to the rest of the body. It was like the heart was to humans. And by wounding the face, magical energy gushed out and killed the treant instantly.

If you looked at the face like a heart and the magical energy like blood, they were just like humans. Unlike blood, however, the flow of magical energy could be followed by using magic detection. Put another way, anyone who had the power to use magic detection could instantly locate a treant's weak point.

With the axes, I attacked those points from outside their range of attack and killed them with a single blow. This didn't require the use of magic, so I would never run out of magical energy, and physically enhancing myself made me slow to get tired. To be honest, this made the fight extremely simple. If these were normal throwing weapons, I wouldn't be able to attack anymore once I ran out. But since these were my metal slimes, they just came right back to me. As such, I didn't have to worry about running out of ammo, plus I didn't even need to go and pick the axes back up myself. The treants tried to attack the slimes as they came back, but they were too slow, and their attempts only made them easier to hit. It was more like tedious busywork than a battle at this point.

All of the metal slimes that got attacked made it out unharmed. A wooden stick couldn't do much to a ball of metal, whether it hit or not. I massacred any treant that tried to get behind us, as the rest of the group trampled the treants to our front. Their number rapidly dwindled, covering the ground in treant corpses. All that remained standing were a few sparse trees.

"Well, we did it. But something seems off," Leipin muttered.

"What is?" I asked.

"First of all, this is way too many treants. I've never seen so many at once. Secondly, this is an odd location. Treants are trees who became monsters due to magical energy, but I've never heard of trees becoming treants over such a wide area. And last but not least, have a look at that," Leipin said, pointing to a gigantic tree in the distance. I sensed great magical energy from it.

"Is that the elder treant?"

"I imagine so. I have seen a few elder treants myself, but never one this large and with so much energy. I also have to wonder why the elder treant isn't coming after us."

"Maybe it just hasn't noticed us," Miya said before I could say anything.

"Well, we *have* been killing its fellow treants, so that can't be it. Maybe it knows it can't win, but if that's the case, it would make more sense for it to run away than to stay right there."

"Could there be some reason that it can't leave that spot?" I asked.

"That would make sense, but I've never heard of such a thing happening before. As far as I know, elder treants would always try to either fight or flee."

“We could leave it be, but that might be a bit dangerous,” Asagi said. “Either we slay it, or we return to the guild with the information. Leipin, Ryoma, how is your magical energy?”

“Fine,” said Leipin.

“I’ve hardly used any energy myself,” I said.

“Now that you mention it, I never would have come up with the idea of using slimes as throwing axes. Right, we’ll take a short break, then go after the elder treant.”

With that settled, I asked about the special traits of this enemy. As I had previously heard about higher classes of treant, it sounded like we would have to watch out for its wood magic.

After that discussion, we took our break. During the break, everyone expressed interest in my slime axes. Cilia used a bow as her main weapon, and she was especially curious.

“Ryoma, that weapon is made of slimes, right?” she asked.

“Right. I think I showed you guys a huge scavenger slime on our last job, but this katana and the sheath are pretty much that, just made of metal slimes and iron slimes. I’m better with a katana than any other weapon, but they’re unfortunately hard for me to acquire at the moment, so this was my solution to that problem.”

“I’m glad you were able to come up with a solution,” Asagi said. “But those metal slimes turned into axes?”

“Yes. This weapon takes advantage of the amorphous physique inherent to all slimes, in addition to the metallic nature of metal and iron slimes. By using those two features, I created a weapon that can transform. When I went to purchase equipment maintenance goods the other day, I talked to Tigger, the weapon dealer, about it.”

As a weapon shop owner, Tigger was curious about the idea, so we talked about it extensively. We discussed the possibility of morphing the weapon into entirely different weapons, of freely changing that weapon to match any enemy or situation, but also of the potential danger of the slimes not being a material of a high enough quality to imitate certain weapons correctly. Ultimately, with Tigger’s cooperation, I taught the slimes to transform into a variety of weapons.

“He agreed that they’d work as katana and knives from the start, but I don’t typically use axes, so we worked together to teach the slimes about that.”

“And these are the results?” Leipin asked. “Was it difficult to teach so many slimes?”

“They seem to share their experiences. After they’ve learned something in their big form, they retain that information even once they’ve separated, so it wasn’t too much trouble.”

Not only would my slimes return to me after they were thrown,

but they had the ability to shrink or grow when in big form, so I could transform my one-handed sword into a broadsword at will. The slimes could also automatically repair any damage to the blade, making for an excellent weapon.

"I guess slimes are pretty nuts when you use them as weapons," said Welanna.

"You never have to buy new equipment, either, so it saves money," said Mizelia.

"And the fact that you can use this one weapon indefinitely gives you less to worry about, too," said Cilia.

"You'll never even run out of ammo with a ranged weapon. It's almost like cheating," said Miya.

"Oh, one more thing," I said, taking a rope out of my Item Box. "This rope looks extremely durable, right? I made it from the toughest thread my sticky slimes could produce."

"It does look pretty sturdy, for how thin it is," said Miya.

"Try cutting it with this axe, Mizelia."

"Fine. Wait, I can't seem to cut it," said Mizelia.

"Pretty tough, right? I told Tigger about this thread, and he said he'd try making some armor with it."

"One of these days, I feel like you're gonna be totally covered in slimes," said Miya.

Once we were done chatting and resting, we got moving again. But when we began to walk toward the elder treant, my metal slimes suddenly started to act strange.

"Hold on a second," I said.

"What is it?"

"Something's wrong with my metal slimes. They seem to be afraid of something."

The contract let me know how my slimes were feeling, and it told me that they wanted nothing more than to run away. Maybe there was something here that they couldn't deal with.

"Are they alright?" Miya asked.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think my metal slimes can fight like this."

"Best not to try and force them," Asagi suggested.

I took Asagi's advice and put the metal slimes in my Dimension Home. I was still curious, though. The terror that my metal slimes felt was abnormal. It was as if they were confronted with a natural predator, but all I could see was the elder treant.

"Are elder treants and slimes naturally opposed?" I asked Leipin.

"If they are, I certainly haven't heard of it."

It did seem that only the metal slimes were afraid. The Iron slimes were unaffected, so I didn't understand what the problem was. Thankfully I could still use the iron slimes in the fight, though. I had

spare equipment on hand too, but the iron slime katana was the best weapon available to me.

We carefully proceeded onward until we noticed something strange about our surroundings.

“Look, the tree to the left!”

“Meow!”

My magic detection had told me that this was an ordinary tree, and it was probably the same for Leipin. But when we passed by it, the tree suddenly transformed into a treant and attacked. Thankfully, Leipin noticed it immediately, and Miya made quick work of it.

“What could this mean?” Leipin wondered aloud. “This tree was not a treant a moment ago; it just turned into one. This shouldn’t be possible.”

Trees could become monsters by possessing magical energy, but not instantaneously. The transformation was normally a slow process. Despite that, I sensed the other trees in the area transform into treants.

“Leipin,” I said.

“Yes, I’m afraid more and more treants are being created.”

“Well, this is unexpected,” said Mizelia.

“Who could have seen that coming?” asked Asagi.

There were still a lot less treants than we had fought a few minutes ago, so it was no big deal, but it was hard not to wonder about this unusual incident. I focused on using magic detection to combat the surrounding treants, then noticed an energy reading from underground.

“Something’s underground!” I announced, then cast Break Rock to make the ground crumble, followed by Breeze to blow the dirt away. There were tree roots underneath, and I sensed magical energy flowing through them.

“Those are elder treant roots!” Leipin shouted. “Could the elder treant be sending energy through these roots to transform the trees into treants? That would explain why so many treants have spawned since the elder treant first appeared. But I’m surprised that one has used this ability for a surprise attack. This is a shocking discovery!”

“Can we try and deal with them before thinking about that?!” Cilia cried.

“In any case, will we have to defeat the elder treant to solve this dilemma?” Mizelia asked.

“Most likely,” said Leipin. “Otherwise, it may just produce even more treants.”

“We’re still about five hundred meters from the elder treant,” said Asagi. “Let’s get over there and kill it quick as we can. Ryoma, watch our backs. We’ll take on the elder treant while you hold the other

treants back!”

“Got it!”

We quickly got into action. Welanna, Miya, Mizelia, and Asagi chopped down the treants in our path. Leipin, Cilia, and I followed behind them. Thankfully, the treants were slow and did little to obstruct us. But as we got closer to the elder treant, it began to attack us directly. It was still too far away to strike with its branches, but its roots rose from the ground to attack. Not only that, but it seemed to be using its wood magic to extend its roots in an attempt to capture us. Leipin cast Wind Cutter while the rest of us fought back with our weapons, but there were a lot of roots, and it was especially hard to dodge the ones that attacked from right below us.

Then, I had an idea. I cast Pavement, the spell I used when creating pavement for my store. By solidifying the ground this way, I could buy us some time.

“I’ll help!”

“Thanks!”

Thus, we charged straight at the elder treant.

Chapter 4 Episode 4: Forest Search 3

I sliced through the approaching roots as we ran toward the elder treant. Its bark was dark in tone, and the circumference of its trunk was at least ten meters. It looked to be around twenty meters tall. The trunk was lumpy or cracked in places, making it look more ominous than grand. The face on its trunk was round, and about twice as tall as a grown man. It was located near the base of the trunk. The texture and size of the creature made it look that much eerier.

“Ryoma, Leipin, stay out of range of the branches and provide backup! Cilia, support them!” Asagi commanded. We obeyed and stayed in place.

I used Pavement to cover the ground as I threw iron slime axes from a distance, mowing down the treants that crept toward us. Leipin supported me with magic, while Cilia sliced the roots that drew near to Leipin and me.

The rest of the group attacked the elder treant itself, but it could take more punishment than we anticipated. The size of its body, in tandem with a wood spell called Grow, made it quite an irksome foe. That wasn't a spell which usually had healing effects, but elder treants were plant monsters, so growing themselves was effectively identical to healing. We still had the upper hand, but we had to remain vigilant.

The elder treant made a sound somewhere between a groan and a scream. I glanced to the side and saw that Mizelia had pounded its face with her axe. It looked like she'd already hit it a few times, but this blow dug deeper than the others. Welanna and Miya promptly followed up with their own attacks.

But the elder treant struck back with an unexpected counterattack. Its mouth spat a black orb at Welanna. She dodged it despite being taken off guard, but its branches immediately came after her, so she was forced to stop her onslaught.

That attack had to be Dark Ball, a dark spell. Welanna had to stop, but at least Miya was still going. Or so I thought, but then the elder treant exhaled some black mist. Seeing this, Miya retreated.

“What's that?!” she cried. Her axe was rusting before our eyes.

“I'd love to know myself!” Asagi said.

“That last spell was Dark Ball!” Leipin explained. “This elder treant can use dark magic too! That reaction was likely also caused by dark magic!” That defied all the information we had.

“We’re too lacking in understanding!” Asagi declared. “Let’s retreat for now and come up with countermeasures!”
Thus, we were forced to retreat for the time being.



Once we were outside the elder treant’s range of attack, we took a break and talked amongst ourselves.

“Miya, how’s your arm?”

“Just fine, but this thing’s done for,” Miya said and showed us her axe. All of the metal had rusted, and the sharp edge was crumbling. “All thanks to that black mist.”

“This isn’t good,” said Asagi.

“Can’t fight with a weapon like that,” said Welanna.

“Leipin, how should we fight this thing?” asked Mizelia.

“Even I have never heard of an elder treant that can use spells apart from wood magic. I have also never heard of a dark spell which causes weapons to rust. Dark magic can be countered and recovered from by the use of light magic, and dark magical energy can be purged with light magical energy, but this cannot be done perpetually throughout the course of a battle.”

That dark spell could apparently cause metal to rust. Maybe that was what frightened my metal slimes, but that didn’t explain why the iron slimes were unaffected. With that in mind, though, this gave me an idea that I decided to relay to the group.



After I explained my hypothesis, we confronted the elder treant once again. There was a lot that we didn’t foresee about this monster, but it wasn’t strong enough to be that threatening, and we could always retreat if it got dangerous, so any plan was worth attempting.

“Here we go!”

“Pavement!”

After I paved the ground again to block the roots, we charged at the elder treant. When we got close, it began to spew black mist to defend itself.

“Here it comes!”

“Right, let’s give this a shot!”

I hurled an iron slime axe at the elder treant’s face. It passed through the black mist and hit the elder treant right between the eyes. Then, via the effects of our contract, the iron slime told me that it was safe.

“It’s fine! Looks like iron slimes aren’t affected by that spell!”

“Alright, then let’s give it everything we have!” Asagi shouted,

charging at the elder treant's face. Miya, Mizelia, and Welanna followed. Lastly, I cast Fire Arrow as I slashed at the creature.

My idea was to fight using weapons and armor made from my iron slimes. I reminded the party of how my metal slimes were intimidated before the fight with the elder treant, and came up with the hypothesis that they were instinctively afraid because they were metallic. But while the iron slimes were also made of metal, they weren't scared, so I suspected they were immune to the mist.

I also brought up some knowledge I retained from Earth, claiming that my grandfather taught it to me. The more pure iron is, the slower it is to rust. And my slimes evolved into iron slimes when they consumed pure iron that I extracted with alchemy, so their bodies were also highly pure.

It seemed unlikely that the elder treant's mist could cause all metals to rust equally, so we gave this idea a try. Magic could make the impossible possible, with a little bit of imagination, but that didn't mean it could do literally anything. It had to obey the laws of nature to some degree. The more one tried to twist the laws of nature using magic, the more energy it would cost, so there were limits. Even with the effects of magic, I predicted that this spell would have trouble rusting pure iron.

The iron was indeed slow to rust, and while I feared that my iron slimes might be in trouble if the battle went on too long, the rest of the group solved that problem for me. The first step was to throw one iron slime to see what happened, and if that failed, we would retrieve that slime and retreat. It could simply be healed with a method that Leipin mentioned. The core of a slime was its most important part, whereas some rusting on the surface wouldn't pose a serious problem. As long as the rust was stopped before it reached the core, the slime's life could likely be saved.

If the slime was unharmed, we would continue the battle. We constructed a plan based on the information we acquired in the last battle and sought to make this a quick fight. Once the battle was over, we would heal with light magic, just to be safe. And if we couldn't kill the elder treant, we could retreat again.

The rest of the party agreed to help retrieve the slime and retreat as necessary, so we challenged the elder treant to another fight. I joined the fighters on the frontline this time, so we were attacked with even greater ferocity. The elder treant first attacked us with its branches from above. Second, it cast Dark Ball. Third, it blocked the path with its roots. They also tried to ensnare me at the same time, so I sliced through the roots and continued to push onward.

The elder treant's face was right in front of me. I tried to get close and attack, but the elder treant didn't make it easy. It prepared

another Dark Ball as it swung its branches down at me. I twisted out of the way, circling left and right as the branches approached. I severed the branches with my blade, sending them falling to the ground.

Next, I evaded the flying Dark Ball and closed in on the elder treant. Standing just below its face, I slashed at what would have been its throat if it were human. Coated in qi, my blade met no resistance as it sliced through the wood. Tons of magical energy gushed from the huge gash.

Now the elder treant seemed to know it was in trouble. It attacked with less frequency and began to heal the wound, but none of us were going to let that happen. Leipin hit the wound with a mid-tier fire spell called Flame Lance. Blasting its innards with powerful fire seemed to be quite effective, as one would expect. The elder treant's recovery rate dropped precipitously. Not letting this chance escape them, the others all attacked the face and the parts surrounding it at once.

Meanwhile, I prepared for a followup attack. I had my big iron slime transform, and made fifteen of the iron slimes split off. Then, I swiftly made the big iron slime change into an iron ball small enough to carry in both hands. It was covered in sharp spikes and had a semicircular handle with a hole through it, from which I could grip it. Each of the fifteen other iron slimes formed a link for a chain around this loop for me to grab with my right hand. Within about five seconds, I'd changed my katana into a ball and chain.

"Ready when you are!" I said.

This ball and chain was made specifically for dealing heavy damage in a single blow, perfect for large monsters. When I pulled on the chain, it made a clattering sound. The ball was so heavy that lifting it required either considerable strength or the use of enhancing magic. By using energy meditation, I was able to swing it around. Once I worked up some momentum, the ball and chain loudly whooshed through the air. I had no experience with this weapon, but I could probably hit an immobile target.

"Alright, spread out!" Asagi commanded, and the group that had been attacking the elder treant promptly made some space. My target was the elder treant's face.

The iron ball slammed right into its nose with a loud crack, leaving a fissure in its face from which magical energy spewed. The previous attack seemed to have made its face easier to harm. With all the damage it had sustained, it couldn't handle this impact. I had planned to hit it four or five times, but as if it couldn't fight any longer, its roots and branches came to a stop. It was still breathing a little, though.

“Ryoma, you do the honors,” said Asagi.

“You and your slimes did the most work here, after all,” said Cilia.

“Settle this once and for all,” said Welanna.

“Got it.”

I spun the chain again, this time striking the elder treant’s forehead with all my might. With a loud, blunt, sound, the elder treant’s face crumbled. The magical energy spurted out harder for a bit before gradually dying down, until I no longer sensed it.



“Is it dead?” Cilia asked.

“Yes, that takes care of it,” Leipin answered.

After confirming that everyone was unharmed, I used light magic to heal my iron slimes. They seemed fine, but I did it anyway just to be sure. Thankfully, it all ended well.

“And that’s that,” Asagi said as I was casting Light Ball on my iron slimes. He was looking at the treant corpses we left behind. I had no idea how long it would take us to gather all those together by ourselves. It wouldn’t even be able to fit them all in our Dimension Homes.

“Don’t worry,” Asagi said. “Once your slimes are healed, we’ll go back into town and report this to the guild. While we’re there, we can seek help with collecting and transporting the wood. The labor costs can be charged to the guild after we return to Gimul.”

Thus, we returned to town, reported to the guild, and put out a job request. The wood would be collected starting tomorrow. For now, it was time to spend the night resting.

Chapter 4 Episode 5: Forest Search 4

The next day, fifteen adventurers from the guild accompanied us to where we fought the elder treant. They were going to help us collect the wood, but all the wood that couldn't fit in Leipin's Dimension Home was to be temporarily stored in warehouses belonging to the city and the guild. They would be delivered to Gimul by carriage at a later date.

There was a simple reason for that: we'd killed too many treants. The group of adventurers was initially surprised to see that we had slain over a thousand in total. They kept on coming, so we just had to keep killing more. We all slaughtered every treant that entered our range of attack. And adding up our kill counts, we got quite a staggering number.

We'd chopped down so many trees in the form of treants that I was worried about the forest, but according to the local adventurers, it would be fine. The trees in this forest were called torigiri trees, and while they could only thrive in certain locations, they were highly vigorous and quick to grow. They could grow back within half a year of being chopped down at the base, and even when planting seedlings, they would grow large enough to be chopped down for wood within a year. The trees that we cut down would be back to normal next year, so this had little effect on the city's revenue, and few of the townspeople went this deep into the forest to find lumber anyway.

I was satisfied with that explanation, not to mention reminded yet again that this was a whole other world. On Earth, it would take years or even decades for a tree to grow tall enough that it could be chopped down for wood, but here, it was only half a year. Everyday knowledge I'd picked up from Earth just didn't apply here.

"Now, begin!" Asagi declared.

We killed the occasional treant that we found as we collected the wood. The rest of the group gathered the wood in one place so Leipin and I could stuff it in our Dimension Homes and carry it to town, then come back to the forest for more. By 3 p.m., we'd finished collecting the wood. Lastly, to make sure the guild in Gimul was prepared to receive the wood, I sent Eins to my store to ask my employees to contact the adventurer's guild. Now everything related to treant wood was taken care of, so the adventurers who helped us out headed back to town.

But there was still one job left for us. We had to tear the elder treant apart and collect its wood. The job in Gimul specified treant wood and not elder treant wood, so it wasn't for that. In these situations, the hunter could use the materials as they wished, but if we wanted the adventurer's guild to help us chop down and transport this elder treant, it would cost us. However, elder treant wood was top rate when it came to creating magic staffs. It would go for a high price, so leaving it here would be wasteful. As such, we wanted to take the wood for ourselves. But it was enormous, so it would probably take a while.

"Well, this is the last job. Let's get it over with," Welanna said and picked up her hatchet.

The first task was to chop off all the branches. We brought ladders to help with that, but this elder treant was so tall that it didn't reach some of the branches.

The rest of the group took care of the branches that the ladders reached, while I handled the ones that couldn't be reached. I used the sturdy rope made of sticky slime thread and tied a claw made of my metal slimes to the end to create a grappling hook. I spun it a few times to build momentum, then threw the claw around a thick branch. I tugged the rope a few times, but it didn't budge. It seemed to be tough enough to handle some weight. I climbed the rope until I was within range of the surrounding branches, then cut them down one by one using the Wind Cutter spell. Once there were no branches left around me, I changed locations and did the same thing elsewhere.

I thought it would be easier to just knock down the tree first, but the branches were apparently better suited for making staffs than the trunk, and that would break the branches, so this was my only recourse. I silently continued my work, ultimately spending the entire day on those branches. I decided to leave the rest for tomorrow. Climbing up and down the tree once or twice was fine enough, but doing it repeatedly was inevitably exhausting.

The next day, we continued to work on collecting wood from the elder treant. We finished breaking all the branches off, so today we were going to dig out the roots and knock the tree down. But an unexpected incident occurred.

"Come over here for a second, everyone!" I cried.

My earth slimes and I were using earth magic to dig near the tree, when we found tons of decaying wooden boxes buried underneath.

"What is it?" asked Cilia.

"Did something happen?" asked Welanna.

"It looks like something's buried here. See?"

"Are these wooden boxes?" asked Asagi.

"There's a whole bunch of them," said Miya.

“Why are all these buried here?” wondered Mizelia.

“In any case, we should look inside some of them,” said Leipin, who carefully pulled a box out of the ground and opened it. It was packed full of murky white rocks.

“What could these be?” I asked.

“They’re magic crystals,” said Leipin. “And they’ve already been used. They look more transparent like ordinary crystals when they still have magical energy inside, but as they lose that energy, they become murkier and harder to see through. All of these are completely empty.”

“Sounds like we’d best report this to the guild,” said Asagi.

“I’ll go tell them,” Leipin offered. “Can the rest of you keep digging and checking the rest of the boxes?”

Nobody had any complaints, so Leipin teleported to town. We stayed behind and opened up the rest of the boxes. Nearly all we found was fully used magic crystals. Some, however, had a little magical energy left over. The energy in these was either non-elemental or dark elemental. Then we learned why so many magic crystals were here.

“I have returned,” Leipin said. “Has anything changed here?”

“Hello,” a woman attending Leipin greeted us. “I was sent by the guild to—Eek!”

She yelped when she saw what lay at our feet. Anyone would have been surprised. There were human corpses sitting there, after all.

“Where did these come from?”

“They were buried with these boxes,” Asagi explained.

The bodies were thoroughly rotted, but judging by the bone structure of the corpses, they were presumably men.

“Some of their things were still with them,” I said.

“Well, thank you for explaining, then,” the woman said haltingly.

“Are you okay?”

“I handle seeing blood or injuries well enough, but seeing bodies in this state does make me a little sick. I’m sorry, but can you help out a little?”

The pale woman accompanied us in looking through their belongings. We found an accounting book indicating that the men were magic crystal merchants, and they had engaged in illegal acts such as smuggling and black market dealings. These magic crystals seemed to be their merchandise. It was unclear if they had been in the middle of a transaction in the forest away from watching eyes, or if this was a secret hiding place for their contraband, but the elder treant must have absorbed the magical energy from the crystals and grown massive as a result. And by using the power of the crystals, it created legions of treants and even gained the ability to use dark magic. The

elder treant never left this spot because it had no way of taking the boxes of magic crystals with it.

“Thank you for your cooperation,” the woman said. “You can get back to work, if you’d like. Farewell!”

With her investigation complete, the woman ran off. We watched her go, then resumed our work.

Once the elder treant was knocked on its side, I used a giant saw made of my iron and metal slimes to chop it into pieces, then stored them in my Dimension Home. Now we had done everything we needed to do in this town, but due to our last unfortunate discovery, it didn’t feel as satisfying as it should have. That called for one thing.

“Shall we drink tonight?” I suggested.

Since it would dispel this awkward feeling we had, we decided to celebrate a job well done after dinner. The gathering place was my Dimension Home.

“We still have to make it back to Gimul, but we’ve acquired plenty of treant wood,” Asagi said. “We can consider this job complete. Tonight, we drink. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” the rest of the party said, then began to drink and eat the snacks we prepared.

Today, our drinks were accompanied by tempura. There were plenty of vegetables to be picked in the forest where we hunted the treants, and they were on sale at a grocer in town. Only Asagi and I knew about tempura, but after all the Japanese food I had provided on this journey, they were interested. And to my surprise, the people of this country seldom ate fried food.

“They were selling fries at the Founding Festival, so I thought it was normal,” I said.

“It exists, but here’s the thing: fried food means wasting a lot of oil,” Cilia replied. “I hear that using the same oil repeatedly makes you sick too, so it gets kind of needlessly expensive. High-quality oil goes for a lot of money.”

“And if you don’t know how to fry food properly, you can start a fire,” Welanna added. “So festivals are the place for it.”

Those were the reasons why most households didn’t cook fried foods. I thought it was sad to go your life without ever frying food yourself, personally. But admittedly, it did use up a lot of oil, and reusing oil did cause it to oxidize and become unhealthy. I could use alchemy to separate the oxidized oil from the oxygen anyway, though, so I could reuse oil as much as I wanted to, as long as it didn’t get too dirty. Actually, I could just separate the oil from the filth too. I used alchemy when making juice or cooking with oil, among other things, but I didn’t know if that was a proper way to use alchemy. Either way, it was too convenient to stop now.

“But wow, your slimes sure are weird, Ryoma,” said Mizelia.

“Slimes are omnivores. It’s not strange that they can drink, but still,” said Leipin.

“It’s actually savoring and enjoying its drink. The tempura, too,” said Cilia.

In addition to the three men and four women at the party, one of my slimes was joining us. Ever since I gave it some ale, it would come up to me while I was drinking at night. I started to drink with it regularly, and at first, it devoured its alcohol all at once the way that other slimes did water. But recently, I made it start using a sake cup which was made just for slimes, and it gradually began to drink as slowly as I did. It even started to pour itself more when its cup was empty, and it ate whatever I was eating with my drinks too.

As I was telling the rest of the party about this, the slime suddenly began to quiver.

“Oh, could it be?” said Asagi.

“Is something wrong?” asked Miya.

“The slime’s evolving,” I said.

“Huh?!”

There was no doubt that the slime was evolving. When I told them that, all eyes turned to the slime. Then, much like with my other slimes, it began to release and absorb magical energy for about ten minutes.

“It appears to have stopped,” said Leipin.

I checked to see what my slime had evolved into.

Drunk Slime

Skills: Alcohol Production (4), Disease Resistance (3), Consume (5), Absorb (1), Split (1)

Blessing: Protection of Tekun, God of Wine

Now I was confused. Not because it became something called a “drunk slime,” which was hardly surprising, considering it had been drinking. I could understand why Alcohol Production would be one of its skills as well. The alcohol was obviously the cause. But I didn’t know how it was blessed by Tekun. I didn’t even know that slimes could be blessed. It would be something to ask Tekun about at some point.

In any case, I checked what magical energy it preferred and discovered it liked the dark, water, and wood elements the most.

“Ryoma, what happened?” Leipin asked.

“Oh, well, it became something called a drunk slime with a skill called Alcohol Production. I’m guessing it can spit up alcohol.”

“Another unusual slime, is it?”

I placed a new bowl in front of the slime and had it demonstrate its new skill. As anticipated, the drunk slime released fluid that smelled like alcohol. I cast Appraisal on it and found that it was 40% alcohol, safe for humans to consume, so I tried some.

“Well, that’s certainly alcohol, alright,” I said.

“Is something wrong with it?”

“It’s strong enough, but it has no flavor.”

And because it had no particular flavor, it wasn’t especially good. Rather than drink it neat, maybe it would be better if mixed with fruit. This would require some research. As I thought about the possibilities, we celebrated the evolution of my slime by drinking some more. After the party, I went to bed.

Chapter 4 Episode 6: Invited to the Training Meetup

A few days later, when we got back to Gimul and headed to the adventurer's guild to report our success, a meeting was immediately held.

"I'm sorry about the wait," said Worgan. "I've heard the general details through messages from Ryoma. I'm glad you all made it back in one piece. Now, can you give me a more detailed report?"

Asagi began to describe the events. His report went over only what was necessary and was easy to follow. Worgan had the occasional question, but it took no more than ten minutes for him to finish. Then we were given permission to leave, aside from me.

"Oh, sorry, Ryoma, could you stay for a bit?" Worgan told me.

I didn't know why, but I couldn't say no to the guildmaster.

Worgan and I were the only ones in the meeting room.

"Hold on a sec, I know I put it somewhere around here."

The sound of flipping through pages of documents was the only noise in the room.

"Here we are! This is it. Since you got back sooner than expected, you should be able to send an application in time. Interested in participating?"

He handed me a document that described a training meetup for new adventurers. According to this, it would start in the morning five days from now, and it would last five days. The training would involve camping skills that were crucial for any adventurer. It would take place somewhere called the Poison Bug Plains. The bottom of the document served as an application form. If I just wrote my name and turned it in, I could join.

There wasn't anything strange about that in itself, but this was an application for teachers, not for students.

"Look, it's about camping, and it's for newbies at that. Not like you'll be going to a frigid mountain or anywhere that harsh, and you've lived in the forest for years. What have you got to learn?"

"Fair enough. Is that why you want me to teach instead?"

"There is that, but I think this job could also help you in the long run."

"Why is that?"

"You're planning to raise your rank before you go to the Sea of

Trees of Syrus, right? Adventurer ranks aren't just determined by power. If you proactively take jobs like this, it'll make raising your rank a little easier."

"Huh, is that so?"

"Of course, you need enough skill to actually teach. As an organization, we need our weaker members to grow. Anyone who goes out of their way to help with that cause will get some preferential treatment. You're tough enough to move up the ranks, to be sure, but your age is an obstacle. You're just too young. You also need to get to C Rank to enter the Sea of Trees, and you see a lot of adventurers give up and retire before they get there. Most folks who make it to C Rank only make it after years of work. If you want to move up quickly, you should take jobs like this."

"I see."

"And as you move up the ranks, you get access to more difficult, more dangerous jobs. There'll be more jobs you can't take without a party, so you'll probably have to team up with people you don't know sometimes. There's something I've been wondering ever since you first joined the guild. You just love to do things on your own, right? It's not that you don't get along with groups, is it? You've teamed up with Asagi's group twice, and Miya's three times. Everyone's got a good impression of you. Maybe you think it's more annoying to work with a party, but I know you're capable of doing it when you want to. I just think you should get a bit more accustomed to working in teams sooner than later. And that should include people you don't already know."

"And you think this job will be perfect for that?"

"I sure do. These makeshift parties you might have to work with will usually put whoever has the highest rank in charge. You seem like you could make it to a pretty high rank, but it'd be a pity if you made it that far and found you're not cut out to be a leader."

This was a personal recommendation from the guildmaster, and there was something in it for me, so I figured I'd give it a shot, as much as it wasn't my thing.

"Understood. I'll take the job. But these documents only state the location and the dates. Are there other teachers?"

I felt like we should discuss how to approach the lessons in advance.

"Oh, don't worry about that. You'll meet them the morning before you start. That'll be enough."

From what Worgan told me, this would be somewhat different from what I imagined a training meetup to be. First, the students would join either as individuals or with their party. They would prepare for the trip on their own, then meet up with the teachers to

leave town together. But the students wouldn't be sorted into groups under particular teachers or anything.

"I already picked out someone with tons of experience to lead the whole thing. You're there to provide support, essentially. Make whatever preparations you need to, and meet up with the group at the specified time. As far as how you'll be teaching, just set up camp the way you normally would. The other teachers will be instructed to do the same. This can mean either bringing your own tools or using what's available on site; whatever you want. Seeing what you do up close should be useful to them at some point."

They wanted us all to do it our own way as a demonstration, apparently.

"You don't have to go out of your way to advise the students, either. The ones who really want to learn will learn by watching you, and if they ask questions, just answer them. Your main job as a teacher is to ensure their safety. If you see them doing anything too dangerous, then you can intervene to stop them. But if they'd only hurt themselves in a way that can be healed with magic, stand back and let it be a lesson for them."

This was kind of a fast and loose way to teach. Maybe they even set it up expecting students to fail and hurt themselves. And the role of the teachers was to make sure they didn't injure themselves permanently. I guess that'd be the best way to make them avoid mistakes down the line. But it sounded like the stakes were higher than for the average teacher.



"See you later, Maylene," I said to the receptionist after I left the meeting room and placed the treant wood in my Dimension Home in the designated area.

"Oh, Ryoma. Here for your reward?"

"That, plus I'm applying for next week's training meetup. Also, I'd like to buy some information again," I said and presented my guild card and application.

"If you like information, then here, how's this?" Maylene asked and grabbed a pamphlet from under the desk. It seemed to have information about the Poison Bug Plains.

"On the off chance you're looking for information on the Poison Bug Plains before you head there yourself, I thought this would be good. Did I jump to conclusions?"

"No, that's exactly what I need. But how much information is in this pamphlet?"

"It lists the monsters found in the Poison Bug Plains around this time of year, plus the herbs you can pick, and it contains a simple map

with info on the terrain. It was made for this training meetup, so it should have all the information you want,” Maylene said. I trusted her enough to accept that.

“I’ll buy it, then. You can take the cost out of my reward for the treant wood.”

“Thank you for using our services. Would you like to take another job, as long as you’re here?” Maylene asked and took out a list of jobs.

“What’s this?”

“Doing a job in the area is part of the training meetup. All of the students are supposed to take one. The teachers don’t have to, but you’d make a little extra money that way.”

Looking over the list, I found that many of the jobs were about collecting herbs or poison bugs. They were all ingredients for medicine, so that wasn’t strange in itself, but one of the herbs stood out.

“Excuse me, but are the giyamana grass roots supposed to be delivered to the guild in some other town?” I asked.

Giyamana grass was easy to pick once found, but it went bad quickly. After uprooting the plant, you had a day at most to make it into medicine. I didn’t know where the Poison Bug Plains were, but considering the length of the training meetup, it would most likely go bad before I returned to town. The value of giyamana grass after it went bad seemed questionable. The list also included herbs that would have to be processed in some way after being picked, as well as some that were especially difficult to pick. There was even tormack tree bark, which was supposed to be unobtainable this season. It was a type of bark used in medicine which naturally peeled off at the start of spring, and that was when it was meant to be harvested. It could be stripped from the tree now, but it would lack most of the desired medicinal properties.

“Right, I forgot to tell you something. Lend me your ear,” Maylene said and leaned over the counter, her beautiful face drawing near to me. “I can’t really say this out loud, but some items on this list are traps meant for the students. If they properly collect information in advance, they’ll either know how to complete the task or know that it can’t be completed. But if they slack off, they’re sure to fail. That failure won’t be left on their records, though.”

“Oh, I get it. Do the guilds do things this way all the time?”

“That’s not an easy question to answer. Every guild does training meetups, but environments differ by location, and the guidelines are decided by guilds on a local level. Some probably do the same thing as us, but there are also some which provide month-long lessons in classrooms instead. It just comes down to who’s in charge of the department, I guess. The guildmaster came up with the plans for this

meetup, by the way.”

That reminded me that I was ambushed during my registration test too. It all made sense.

“I’m allowed to tell this to the teachers, but please keep it a secret from the students.”

“Understood. Also, I’m going to refrain from taking any jobs this time. I can pay more attention to the students that way.”

“Sounds good. Here’s your reward for a job well done. It’s been divvied up between all the members of your party, and the information fee’s been deducted from your portion. Here’s your guild card back.”

“Thank you.”

I took the bag containing my reward money and left the guild.



Chapter 4 Episode 7: Negative Inheritance

I stopped by the store to inform them that I was back in town, and they told me what had transpired while I was away. It sounded like everything had gone as smoothly as usual, but they did have two matters to inform me about which were unrelated to work.

“This is from Weizen,” Carme said as he handed me a letter.

There were also two framed pieces of paper on the desk in my office. It took me a while to remember what Weizen was, but it was the name of Fina, Maria, and Jane’s village. It was written on their resumes, but I’d completely forgotten about it.

“Looks like it was sent by the mayor,” I noted.

The letter said that they had decided to produce and sell barley tea, and that they were grateful to me. It seemed that the village was in agreement on the idea, and that they were working well with the Saionji Trading Company. Each of the families was processing their barley reserves, and they were making plans with Pioro to build a processing plant where numerous people could work at once, as well as increase their barley production.

When Pioro got my letter of introduction and a sample of the tea, he apparently went to visit the village himself. While he was there, he even bought their excess grains aside from the barley. They certainly sounded happy. To show their appreciation, they also sent a special thank-you letter and a certificate stating that I was the Weizen Barley Tea Factory’s advisor. Both of those things occupied the two picture frames.

This advisor position seemed to be entirely honorary and required no input from me. I wasn’t getting paid for it, either, but they intended to periodically send me some tea leaves so I could appraise their quality.

“Congratulations on the advisor position,” Carme said.

“Thank you.”

I hadn’t done anything to earn it, but I decided to accept the compliment.

“And what about the other message?”

“Right. We’ve been catching wind of some curious rumors. The denizens of the slums have been saying that the slums will be demolished to build a new district, and that they’re all going to be

driven out.”

“That doesn’t sound good.”

It was strange, though. I understood their concerns, but I didn’t know why they thought that was going to happen now. The same went for Carme, so he immediately investigated, apparently.

“I checked with the merchant’s guild, and it sounds like the public office has no such plans. But there was some scandal at the public office before we started work here, wasn’t there?”

“There was. They’ve appointed a new leader since then, though. Does the public not trust him?”

“It seems that way. The incident was considered resolved when the old leader was thrown out, but they likely haven’t regained the trust they lost. It looks like suspicion begets suspicion.”

I thought back to the man who I met during the Founding Festival. He took over the public office, but it sounded like cleaning up after the old leader’s mess was going to be rough.

“Does this affect our business in some way?”

“For now, not at all. But I hear that people from the slums have been seeking jobs over the past few days, and they’re proactively visiting stores which are currently hiring. We aren’t hiring at the moment, but we might receive visitors looking for work. I think we should figure out what to do if that happens.”

“Well, do we need any more employees?”

I had enough money to pay new recruits, but my current employees were running the laundromat just fine. Even if I wanted to open more stores in the future, I couldn’t think of a reason to rush into hiring more workers right away.

On the other hand, people from the slums had been helping with my store since it first opened. I even had a lot of acquaintances from the slums. If they were in trouble, then I wanted to help them out somehow.

“I think it depends on the person, but for as long as I’ve worked here, I haven’t had a bad impression of anyone from the slums,” Carme said.

“I thought it’d be more dangerous at first myself.”

“In most cases, I think your assumption would be correct. Once a city reaches a certain size, there tend to be places that the guards don’t bother patrolling. The fact that this city’s slums still have patrols makes them as safe as possible, you could say.”

That was interesting, but we were getting off-topic. If I were to hire someone new, maybe they could transport clothing for us, but we didn’t need that many workers in that role. That was except for the busiest hours, so hiring someone part-time was an idea. That would free up another employee to take orders, which could decrease the

wait time for customers.

I proposed the idea to Carme.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“We would have to hold an interview with the person first, and make sure they’re not trying to steal cleaner slimes. Aside from that, this wouldn’t give us more workers than we know what to do with, so I think it would be fine. If we find someone who has potential, maybe they could even be hired full-time one day.”

“Can you get that set up, then?”

“As you wish. That’s all I had to report today.”

“Thanks as always. I’ll see you again in five days.”

“I’ll take care of the store while you’re gone. By the way, Boss, what will you be doing for the rest of today?”

“Well, I need to go home and check on the mine. If something started living there while I was gone, I’ll have to exterminate it.”

“You only just got back from a long journey, so don’t forget to get some rest.”

“Thank you.”

With his report finished, Carme returned to the front of the store. I took Carme’s advice and went home early.



I was walking toward the northern gate on the road through the residential district when I smelled a sweet, refreshing aroma. It seemed to be coming from a nearby home. On closer inspection, it actually appeared to be a cafe.

A sign next to the cozy wooden house said this was the Cat’s Forehead, and that they were currently open. Only then did I realize it was around noon, and that it was probably a good idea to eat something. Though I wasn’t sure if it was right to go inside. The sign said they were open, but no customers were entering or leaving, and the words on the sign were crude enough that they could have been left by a mischievous child.

“What are you doing here, Mr. Takebayashi?”

“Hm? Oh!”

I turned in the direction of the words spoken to me and saw a well-groomed man with a small, slightly worn bag under his arm. It was the current chief of the public office.

“Hello,” I said.

“Yes, hello. Are you eating here as well?”

“I ended up stopping here since it smells really nice, but I wasn’t sure if I should go inside.”

“I see. Let me guess, is it because the place looks like a house? I got the same impression when I first saw it. Would you like to go in

with me?"

He invited me to lunch with him. I was hungry anyway, so I saw no reason to decline.

"Welcome."

"I'll take the usual; black tea and the sandwich of the day. Plus some lamon pie after I'm finished, please. I'm with a guest this time, so make it a double order."

"Very well. Please be seated."

When we entered the building, a counter was straight ahead. Sitting on the other side of it was an old cat woman. After Arnold aloofly took his order, she disappeared into the back of the cafe.

"This way," Arnold said, guiding me to a table for four against the wall east of the counter. There was an identical table on the left side, but that was it. This cafe could seat no more than eight people, from what I could tell.

"This place is as small as it appears. Plus, those three items I ordered happen to make up the entire menu. Still, they're all quite delicious."

"Interesting. Do you come here often?"

"I suppose I do. I've been coming five days a week as of late."

So basically every day, then. More than a little often.

"On the other two days, I purchase something close to the public office. I can't cook, you see."

"Understandable. You seem like a busy man. I've heard that a new district's being built south of town."

"You know about that? It's still in the planning stages, though. I'm only going to get busier later."

The look on his face when he said that reminded me of my coworkers on Earth.

"I apologize if I'm mistaken, but you look very tired," I told him.

"Was it that obvious?"

"Maybe not, but I had a hunch. You're not the first one I've seen in a state like that."

Arnold looked at me and let out a heavy sigh.

"I suppose there's no use in hiding it."

Then our food arrived, so I ate my sandwich as I listened to his story. He described it in mild terms, but to cut a long story short, one might say he had a boatload of problems.

First of all, the public office had to rid itself of a lot of people when it ousted the corrupt chief who preceded Arnold. That meant they were somewhat short on workers. They did recruit some new staff, but they still needed some training to do their jobs properly. The old staff that weren't fired could do the work, but these were people who allowed the previous chief to abuse his power. This was as good a

time as any to step up, but most of them weren't terribly proactive.

"That sounds tough. Seriously."

"Do you have any employees like that?"

"Oh, no, I'm quite happy with my employees. But I used to deal with people like that in the past."

I was getting dangerously close to letting the cat out of the bag. In any case, we still hadn't talked about the slums. I wanted to know the situation there, so I shifted the subject in that direction.

"You heard about that too? Nothing in our plans for the construction of this new district states that we will drive the inhabitants of the slums away, and we have no intention of doing so. However..." Arnold furrowed his brow and took another sip of his tea.

It sounded like he knew what had caused the rumors. Most likely, it was a complicated and headache-inducing problem.

"There are some homeless people in the slums, and their makeshift dwellings often block the roads. Some also live in dilapidated buildings that clearly don't meet safety standards. We're asking them to move their belongings and move someplace else, or to fix up their homes. This is all in accordance with the law, and if we were to neglect this matter, we would not be doing our duty."

After word of that got around, it was at some point extrapolated into the idea that they were being driven out of town, apparently.

"I checked our records, and there has been an increase in accidents resulting from destroyed or damaged homes over the last few years, as well as an increase in instances of freezing to death in the winter among the homeless. Something must be done."

But even he didn't believe that he could expect the citizens in these buildings to move or repair their homes right away. He knew that they had little money to spare. That was why he took the responses of the citizens into account. He never considered removing them by force, and for the time being, this was simply a request.

There was a department set up to deal with this specific matter at present, and maybe the construction of the new district was partially meant to create new jobs for these citizens. But the homelessness problem was its own separate beast.

"In any case, fixing these problems in the best possible way for all our citizens is our job and our duty."

"I respect your dedication."

But I started to wonder if these problems didn't exist under the previous chief. Maybe he was just slacking off on that part of the job too.

"Here's your lamon pie."

"Oh, thanks—What the?!"

I was expecting a couple slices of pie, but for some reason, we

were given a whole pie. It seemed like a little much for two people.

“I’ll get those old plates out of the way.”

Once the plates were removed, another lamon pie was left in their place. We each got one whole pie.

“What in the world?”

“I’m sorry. Perhaps asking for double my usual order was a mistake.”

“You order a whole pie for dessert every time?”

“I can’t eat it all in one sitting, so I take the rest to go and have it during my break at work. I tend to want something sweet when I’m tired,” he said bashfully.

It was the first time I saw him smile that day, but he should probably have been worrying about becoming diabetic. I took a bite of the pie myself. The crust was plain but warm, and the sour lamon brought out the flavor of the cream. It was delicious. There didn’t seem to be a ton of sugar, but I didn’t need more than two or three pieces. I decided to take the rest home.

As Arnold Bernhyde ate more and more of the pie, I had never seen him more relaxed. This was what little time he had away from his grueling job, so I tried to avoid ruining his fun.

Chapter 4 Episode 8: The Slums'

Point of View

The next day, it was my first time visiting this large house in the slums since I came to hire Caulkin's team. I knocked on the door and sensed the presence of magical energy as it opened.

"Come in!"

"Excuse me."

I followed the voice inside. It was the same man as last time.

"It's nice to see you again, Lible."

I was curious about the rumors I heard yesterday, so I had Dolce make an appointment with someone who'd know the details, and he introduced me to Lible. He was the advisor to the slums and the one who represented them when negotiating with the public office, so according to Dolce, nobody was a better pick than him.

"Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to me."

"Not a problem, Ryoma. You can use that chair there."

I borrowed a chair that was off in a corner of the room and sat across from him.

"So I heard from Dolce that you wanted to hire someone again?"

"Only part-time, but we're currently getting ready for a new hire."

"That's plenty. As you know, a lot of us have been worried lately. You wanted to ask about that too, yeah? What'd you want to ask specifically?"

"Everything, if you're willing to talk about it."

"I hear you looked into it yourself, though. You probably already know some things."

He had heard that Carme researched the rumors. Then he happened to hear about it when he met with the head of the public office yesterday as well. But I hardly knew anything about the state of the slums. I only knew what Carme and Arnold told me, and what I could guess from that. But I didn't know if my guesses were correct. Maybe there were some misunderstandings between the public office and the citizens of the slums. Either way, they probably wanted to tell their side of the story, and I wanted to know about it. I wanted to help however I could, but I also didn't want to get in the way in the process.

"If you say so. First, what you know about the cause of the rumors

is all true, and so is the fact that we can't trust the public office. They've been surveying the place for a while now, but when people started to come out and say they were asked to leave, it's caused a lot of anxiety."

"Is the reason that you can't trust them what I think it is?"

"Everyone knows there's a different guy in charge now. Doesn't mean they'll do things any different. It's too soon for us to forget what they've done before."

"Right, it hasn't even been a year."

"Yeah, though personally, I think their new boss is trustworthy."

Maybe this was a rude thought, but I found that a little surprising.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he came here, just like you did. Then he told me what was happening on their end, the state of the environment here, and the reason for his request, and then he left. All that stuff about blocking the roads and the danger of damaged homes, I think he's right. Before he took over, they never really came to survey the slums at all, so we were taking advantage of their laziness in a way. Can't argue with his complaints. But the thing is, a fair number of folks have lost their homes because the public office got stingy about paying for the pit toilets to be cleaned."

I didn't know what to say. I decided to just listen quietly, and it sounded like some of the people who made a living cleaning pit toilets couldn't pay rent when their salaries were cut, so they were driven from their homes. As a result, they either had to live on the street or in abandoned buildings. In other words, the public office's past deeds increased the homeless population. To these victims, the same people who took away their homes were now telling them to get off the street and find a house to live in.

"That's the gist of it. You can see why there's a lot of opposition. The homeless stay with people they know when possible, but that started for everyone when they lost their homes. The public office isn't going to reduce the homeless population just by telling them what to do. We're calling for volunteers with construction skills to help repair buildings, but not much has come of it."

"I see..."

It sounded like the citizens were already doing all they could.

"We're currently looking for something else we could do. Seems like that Arnold guy's preparing work for us, but a lot of folks are suspicious of him. They say the people up top are all the same."

Considering everything he told me, I felt like it was only natural that these victims would feel this way. Their trust had to be restored somehow.

"Excuse me, I have a question."

“What?”

“Are people surviving alright?”

The day after I cleaned the pit toilets, when I received the reward for the job, Worgan told me that there were a fair number of other jobs to go around and that there was no need to obsess over cleaning the pit toilets. That was why he rejected their cleaning of the pit toilets, from what I remembered.

“Well, some people don’t make things easy, but we’ll get by as long as everyone’s helping each other out with food and the like. If the public office hadn’t come and said anything, I doubt there’d even be an uproar right now.”

“Putting people’s trust in the public office aside, what do you think would happen if the housing problem was solved?”

“There’d be no reason to complain to the public office, so there’d probably be no more rumors. Why do you ask?”

“Maybe I’ve neglected to consider something that I should have.”

When I first heard that people from the slums were looking for jobs, I just thought about how they wanted money without considering why they wanted it.

“They want money so they can get a house and have their needs met?”

“Well, rent’s only going to be worse for them if they get houses, and if you’ve been kicked out of a house once, it’s hard to rent one again. That information gets passed around to all the landlords in the city, so they’ll be onto you. And even if they manage to rent a place somehow, they’ll just end up back on the streets if they can’t pay the rent.”

There were a lot of issues tangled into this, but as long as the housing problem was solved, maybe the tension would die down for a while. But even now that my focus was narrowed down, there was a lot to think about.

“The ones actively trying to find a job are better off than some. At least they still have the desire to escape homelessness on their own. The ones who don’t care anymore could be given jobs, money, and house, and there’s still no telling if that’ll help. Maybe it would at first, but they could just as well end up back on the streets at some point. Everyone’s got their own circumstances.”

“This is awfully complicated.”

I thought about what I would do in their position. If I had land, I could either build or repair a house myself. If I didn’t, then I could leave town. But thinking about the issue in terms of what I was capable of was entirely unhelpful.

I kept asking questions for a while longer, then came to the conclusion that all we could do was watch the situation unfold and

contribute whatever possible along the way.

“I’m glad you care about us, but don’t worry about it too much. This is between us and the public office. If you provide some safe jobs, then you’re doing more than enough,” Lible said before I left.

I bowed to him, then exited his house.



A prolonged fight with the public office wouldn’t help anything. It seemed like most of them knew this, though. I thought about it all the way up until I got home. I opened my Dimension Home and released my familiars.

“Pirororororo!”

The first to come out were the limour birds. After the six of them flew high into the sky, they approached and receded from the entrances to the many abandoned mines as if to inspect them. It seemed possible that something was living there again. I considered blocking all the entrances in the future. But the creatures that moved in could serve as food for my limour birds or slimes, so I was unsure.

Then I heard a quiet bursting sound. It sounded like the limour birds found some prey. I was going to go check on them, but then I noticed something move. It was next to the house that I built as camouflage. Something at the entrance to the charcoal furnace felt off.

I approached to take a look, and it seemed that something had crawled through the ashes. I cautiously peered into the furnace and discovered a slime that was desperately trying to dig into the ashes. I promptly formed a contract with it to take it for myself. Maybe the slime had simply gotten lost somewhere, but it was unclear. I didn’t even know when it got there. But this slime was evidently eating ash. There was less ash left in the furnace than I remembered. I gave the slime some ash as a test, and it happily ate it. It seemed that it might evolve into a new slime.

I had also just added the fluff slime to my ranks, so I decided this would be a good time to put some information about my slimes on paper. I went to a room in the abandoned mine and jotted down each type of slime that I owned.

Slimes I owned:

- ☐ Poison Slime
- ☐ Acid Slime
- ☐ Sticky Slime
- ☐ Cleaner Slime
- ☐ Deodorant Slime
- ☐ Scavenger Slime
- ☐ Metal Slime

- ☐ Iron Slime
- ☐ Bloody Slime
- ☐ Medicine Slime
- ☐ Healing Slime
- ☐ Earth Slime
- ☐ Wind Slime
- ☐ Dark Slime
- ☐ Light Slime

And there were also the fluff slime and drunk slime I acquired on my last journey. That was seventeen in all. I wanted to wait and see what this slime that ate ash would evolve into, and I actually had other slimes with the potential to evolve into new slimes too. I had acid, cleaner, and sticky slimes that found a unique favorite food as well. I decided to take this chance to write those down.

The acid slime liked the caustic soda I used to make soap, as well as the alkali solution. These could be dangerous if thrown out, so I used my acid slimes to neutralize them. Then I found one that started to drink the fluid that was leftover afterward. After that, I always gave it the fluid that was leftover after making soap and neutralizing the waste. Lately, though, it started to absorb caustic soda by itself. I was still waiting for it to evolve.

I also found a unique cleaner slime while making soap. This one expressed no interest in caustic soda, but it would eat the finished soap. I was also waiting for this one to evolve. Lastly, the sticky slime liked to eat the stalks of the dante flowers I was growing for seeds and dandelion coffee. I found this one during the preparations for the Founding Festival. It could have eaten the seeds or roots instead, so I didn't know why it chose the stalks.

I could imagine a few possibilities for what the previous two specimens would evolve into, but I had no idea with this one. I needed to keep an eye on it. I couldn't wait for these three, and the ash-eating slime, to evolve.

Chapter 4 Episode 9: Training Begins

Three days later, it was time for the training meetup. I visited the guild an hour early and saw some restless adventurers, most likely the students, starting to gather. I walked past them and headed to the second floor.

“Excuse me.”

The instant I stepped into the designated meeting room, eight sets of eyes turned toward me. I didn’t know any of these people, and some of them looked confused.

“Hey!” one of them shouted at me.

I thought I was about to get in a fight, but no.

“Aren’t you Ryoma?!”

“Huh? Yes, why do you ask?”

The middle-aged man approached me with a carefree smile. He looked quite friendly. Well, I should have expected as much. These people were being trusted to act as teachers, after all. They wouldn’t act like hoodlums, presumably. But that didn’t explain why he knew my name.

“I’m sorry, have we met somewhere?”

“Haha, can’t blame you for not remembering. I’m Roche. You actually saved me one time. Hey, guys, come over here!”

Next to Roche, there were two more boorish middle-aged men and two middle-aged women. It did feel like I had met them somewhere before. Their faces triggered something in my memory. But I still didn’t know exactly where I met them.

“Can’t remember?”

“Of course he can’t, we were far from the only people there.”

“You can’t remember every single person you see, can you? That was the only time we ever saw each other.”

“I’m sorry, but I have no idea what you’re all talking about.”

“It was back in spring, at the abandoned mine in the north. There was an outbreak of goblins that you slayed, remember?”

“That?!”

Now I remembered them.

“Were you the patient I treated?”

“You do remember! That really helped, seriously. Without you and your healing slime, I could’ve died.”

“He and I got some more minor wounds healed by you, by the

way.”

“I’m Howard, and this is Lucas.”

The other two men pointed at each other. And when I looked at the women closely, I could tell that they were the ones tearfully thanking me. Now I felt bad for forgetting.

“It’s no big deal. So are you here because you’re a teacher?”

“Yes, at the guildmaster’s recommendation.”

“Really?! Then let me introduce myself properly. I’m Roche, the leader on this job. I’ll give you a rundown later, but if you’ve got any questions, you can ask me.”

“Thank you. I’m good at camping, but I have virtually no experience teaching anyone. I look forward to learning from you.”

Thankfully the job was starting without any incidents. It was strange how we had met before, though. The two women, by the way, were named Lucy and Mimir. They were both magicians.



“Attention, students!”

Once all the teachers had gathered, we had a quick briefing session, then got moving. As soon as we popped into one corner of the guild, Roche shouted in a somewhat different tone than he used with me. Presumably, this was his teaching voice.

From what I was told, he and his allies had semi-retired from adventuring work over the last few years to shift their focus to training new talent. They were veteran adventurers, but like Worgan said, they had plenty of experience as teachers as well.

When Roche finished going over a list of precautions with the students, it was time for all fifteen teachers to introduce themselves. It started with Roche’s party and ended with me.

“Hello, I’m Ryoma Takebayashi. Before I came to this town, I lived in a forest called Gana for three years, where I survived by camping and hunting. That’s why my rank is only E, but the guildmaster decided I know enough about camping, procuring food, and distinguishing between medicinal and poisonous herbs. I’m sure I look young to some of you, but don’t worry about that. My weapons of choice are bows and katana. I also know the fundamentals of magic, and I can use up to High Heal when it comes to healing spells, so if anyone gets hurt, feel free to tell me. We’ll be together for five days, so I hope we all get along well. Nice to meet you, everyone.”

“Nice to meet you,” the group replied. Nobody complained about me openly, but they didn’t react with much enthusiasm either. I guess I should have expected as much.

“That takes care of all that,” Roche said. “There are five carriages waiting outside, so split up into groups of six and get on them! Three

teachers will join you on each carriage! We'll be leaving town in ten minutes! You can take that time to decide who's sitting where and get whatever other business done! Got that? Ten minutes! That's all for now!"

The whole group got moving. There were fifteen teachers including me, and twice as many students. Everyone tried to go outside at once, so the exit to the guild was crowded. I figured I would use this time to go to the bathroom, and when I went outside a few minutes later, most of the students had boarded the carriages. I thought about which carriage to pick for myself when someone called to me.

"Yo, Ryoma."

"Huh? Beck's party? You're joining too?"

In one carriage, I saw six familiar faces.

"Jeff told us all about it, and we somehow managed to save up enough money for each of us."

"And Jeff's got a job to do, so..."

"We decided that when he's away because of his job, we'll take lessons."

"I see, neat."

"But why are you here, Ryoma? You a teacher?"

"The guildmaster suggested I join as a teacher, yes. Good luck, everyone."

Leaving it at that, I parted ways with them. They seemed to have some empty seats, but as a teacher, I thought it would be best not to play favorites with students I knew personally. I ended up in a carriage with Roche and some boys I didn't know instead.

The carriage was oppressively silent. It was situated in the middle of the line of carriages, and I could hear fun conversations from ahead and behind, but everyone here seemed to be strangers to each other. Even an hour after we left, nobody had uttered a word.

"Ryoma," Roche broke the silence, as though he couldn't stand it anymore.

"Yes? What is it?"

"You don't have a whole lot of luggage. Will you be alright?"

All I brought along was a fur knapsack. The other participants had multiple knapsacks or even camping gear and sleeping bags, so I had relatively little.

"I'll be fine. I've stored enough supplies for five days using space magic."

"You can use space magic?"

"Yes. I wanted to travel as lightly as possible, so this knapsack only contains the absolute necessities. I'm confident that I could camp for two or three days with what's in here alone, but if you include

what's in my Item Box, I can easily go for five days."

"Guys that can use space magic would have an easy time with that, I guess. We tried it a long while back, but none of us could use space magic. Then we tried finding magic items enchanted with space magic, but they were too expensive for how much storage space they offered, so we gave up on that. You know, the rest of you kids can talk too. Talk about whatever you want, you won't lose points or get penalized or whatever, that's not the kind of lesson this is."

"You'll wear yourselves out if you're this tense on the carriage ride," Lucy added. "Try and take this time to relax."

That seemed to get the students to lighten up somewhat. However, they didn't know what to talk about. It's not easy to just start a conversation on command. I knew how that felt painfully well.

"Roche, can you think of any topic that we could all discuss?"

"I think I've got one. What abilities do you think are important for an adventurer trying to move up the ranks?"

"Strength, I guess?" one of the students said timidly.

That got the others to start talking. Some more specific answers were skill with a weapon or with magic. One even suggested that patience was the most important ability. Roche agreed that those were important, but put them aside and gave his own response.

"The correct answer is the ability to cooperate and communicate. The higher your rank, the more difficult that jobs are going to get. And when it comes to monster-slaying jobs, they're also going to get more dangerous. That's why adventurers form parties. I won't say that's strictly necessary, but you don't see nearly as many adventurers working alone once they hit D Rank. And when you look at C Rank and above, there are only a handful of them. At that point in your career, it turns out that what you really need is cooperation and communication."

"Ideally each party member makes up for the faults of other members, but don't expect to find the perfect teammates right away," Lucy said. "When you're working with someone, your compatibility and capacity to coordinate is even more important than your individual abilities. Most adventurers repeatedly switch between parties in search of one that fits."

Party members could also leave due to retirement or injury. Situations could also arise where an adventurer would need to argue with their party over how a reward was to be divided between them, or with a client making unreasonable demands, so negotiating could be a surprisingly vital skill.

"When it comes to jobs, the guild generally talks with the client over what'd be an appropriate reward," Roche said. "But a decent number of clients directly negotiate with adventurers to try and

convince them to work for less. The higher an adventurer's rank, the more you have to pay."

"And it's not like it can hurt to have those skills in any profession," I interjected.

"Ryoma's right. But your answers about strength weren't wrong either. Reaching the upper ranks without strength is pretty much impossible. Not without a lot of luck. But if you did luck into it, you'll probably have a lot more trouble than someone who made it there the hard way. Any questions?"

"Have any tips for how to form a party? Where should you go? Should you look for members at a bar or something?"

The students started to get more proactive.

"I'd just go to the guild, that's your best bet," Roche answered.

"Right," Lucy agreed. "You can get introduced to other adventurers if you ask at the reception desk, which is safer than teaming up with strangers in any old place. If someone's a rude and violent adventurer, the guild will at least tell you first." That reminded me of how in Lenaf, there were people who teamed up with someone at a bar and ended up getting used. "When you're picking a party, pay attention to how frequently they need to recruit new members. If they go through a lot of members, there must be a reason people aren't sticking around. I'd also watch out for any parties that have gone a long time without being able to recruit a new member. If a party doesn't have problems, they'll usually be able to recruit someone right away."

"Oh, right," Roche seemed to remember something. "You should also pay attention to who these other adventurers associate with. Adventurers should value their connections with fellow adventurers, but sometimes you'll see folks form groups outside the guild. There's nothing wrong with that in itself, but these groups tend to commit crimes. Even in Gimul, there was a group of criminal adventurers called the Fang of Obtemo back in spring."

I almost forgot about that, since it felt so long ago. Roche and Lucy explained that situation in more detail to the students. The six students on this carriage presumably weren't present for that incident; they were captivated by the story.

"And that's how the tables were turned and their plot came to light," Roche concluded. The students had grave looks on their faces. Hopefully, they would remember this when it came time for them to find party members. "By the way, the young adventurer who beat them was none other than Ryoma here."

"What?!" the six students gasped and looked at me. They asked me all about the incident. I was barraged with questions until the carriage finally stopped.

Chapter 4 Episode 10: Camping, Day 1

“Everyone get your luggage together and assemble!” Roche commanded. Other teachers were still watching the carriages, but everyone else assembled. “I think some of you know this already, but I’ll explain the basics. First of all, there are a lot of campsites set up in areas that get a lot of visitors to make it easier for travelers to set up camp. There’s one of those here, and as you can see, it’s just an open area in the middle of a mountain path. See the sign?”

There was indeed a sign. It displayed a picture of a river and an arrow pointing to where water can be found.

“Most campsites have an easy place to set up tents and a place to get water. The owners of the land make these places to help travelers, and to help adventurers train the next generation. That’s why campsites are free for anyone to use.”

“But while we have the right to use them, there are rules you have to remember. They’re all pretty common-sense things. There aren’t too many, and they’re not that complicated, so don’t worry about it too much. Today I want to go over those rules, then have everyone prepare to set up camp. If there’s anything you don’t know, feel free to ask any of the teachers. We’ll need to take turns standing guard at night, but aside from that, you’ll have free time. Use it to get some rest, gather food in preparation for tomorrow, or whatever else you want as long as you’re not getting in anyone’s way.”

After he explained the plan, he discussed the rules for using the camp. We couldn’t pollute the camp and had to put it back in the state we found it in to whatever extent possible after we left, among other rules you’d expect. We were also told what was customary for when others were using the camp at the same time.

Then, as planned, it was time to prepare to set up camp, the objective of this trip. First we needed to secure our own sleeping space, so everyone including the teachers got ready for that. I went to one corner of the campground and cast Earth Wall to summon four walls from the ground, creating an appropriately sized area. Two of the walls were a little longer than the others. I divided up the space within to create a bed and bathroom. Then I created two thinner slabs of earth to use as a roof. I filled the space between the roof and the walls with earth and solidified it with the Rock spell, mostly

completing the work on my hut for today. To finish, I checked my Item Box, but it was taking a while to find what I was looking for.

“Um, excuse me!”

“Yes, what is it?”

I turned around and saw five confused boys and girls. None of them were the kids who rode in my carriage. It looked like they had been watching me, but only just decided to ask questions. Honestly, I was weirdly nervous waiting for someone to talk to me.

“It looks like you were using magic. You’re setting up camp, right?”

“Right. It still just looks like a stone box, but I’m going to put some holes in it and install these,” I answered the lively boy and showed him the door and window screens I had in my Item Box.

“Should you be using that much magical energy when camping? Adventurers are supposed to save their energy for emergencies. I was taught that magicians should try not to waste their magical energy,” a strong-willed girl asked. She was wearing light armor and wielding a staff, so she was probably a magician.

“That’s true. If you’re away from town, then it’s hard to get as much rest as you could otherwise. That’s why it’s typically agreed upon that magicians shouldn’t cast spells needlessly, and I think that’s correct too. But I don’t think that using magic in a way that will improve your sleep is a waste.”

One’s environment can affect the quality of one’s sleep, which impacts stamina and focus. In order to use your power to the fullest, it’s best to create an ideal sleeping environment. But in my case, I happened to have a lot of magical energy and could use it freely anyway; that was something the students might not have been able to replicate. But maybe there was something I could teach them.

“Come with me for a minute,” I said, and brought the five of them next to the base I was constructing.

I created four tall stakes with earth magic and wrapped a rope around them to make a square space, then filled that square with more ropes tied from one end of the square to the other to make a simple hammock. I jumped onto it to see how it works, and demonstrated that it was strong enough to hold my weight. Next, I took a big waterproof cloth out of my Item Box and draped it over the stakes, and in no time, I had set up a tent that could withstand wind and rain.

“With just these tools, I’ve set up a place to sleep. This method makes it hard for bugs to get in, and it works pretty much anywhere. And most importantly, it didn’t cost as much magical energy as my other method. Something like this shouldn’t cost too much for you, for example.”

"Me?" the lively boy from before said.

"You don't look like a magician, but do you use magic in fights?"

"No, I don't know how."

"But you do have magical energy, right?"

"Some. Enough to cast a couple offensive spells if I could."

"Then there's no reason for you not to use that magical energy on something else, is there?"

Even a single wall would be good for blocking wind and sunlight, and if he couldn't use magic, he could still use a magic item. For people whose fighting style didn't involve magic, they may as well use that energy in other ways. They didn't have to set up camp mostly with magic like I did, but they could use a little bit when it was convenient. After I told them this, they thanked me and left.

"That's a unique way of thinking about it. Magic items, though?"

"What if you just learned to use magic for yourself? I could teach you the basics."

"Well, he was more normal than I expected, at least."

I didn't know what that was supposed to mean. They didn't seem to be questioning my knowledge or teaching skills; they just thought I was abnormal. I didn't even use my slimes, alchemy, or anything else that only I could use, and I was trying to take this seriously. Also, they probably should have gotten a bit further away before talking about me behind my back.

"Hey, nice job on your first lesson."

"Oh, Howard, hello."

"Sounded like you did pretty decently."

"You think so?"

"They got what you were saying, and it seemed like it got them thinking as well. You can tell if someone's a bad teacher when the students can't understand what they're saying. So conversely, you're pretty good."

"That's good to hear."

Howard seemed kind of casual, but maybe he was just trying to break the ice. As long as we were talking, I decided to ask something I was curious about.

"By the way, is my way of setting up camp unusual?"

"I'd say so. Like you were saying, you should avoid wasting energy when you're out of town. You're right about it not being so much of a waste to use that energy for camping, but most people just bring a tent and tools from town. Advanced users of space magic can apparently create a safe space for themselves, but no newbie can do that. The best they could do with magic is light a fire or replenish their drinking water if they run out. You seem fine, but how much magical energy do you have left?"

“More than enough. I have a lot of magical energy to spare, thankfully. I’ve been told that I have as much as a court magician would.”

“Guess that’s why you seem fine, then. If this isn’t too tough for you, then it seems like a great way to set up camp to me.”

“Ryoma, do you have a second?” Lucas asked.

Lucas was the largest of his team of three by a long shot. That and the big metal hammer on his back made him look like a force to be reckoned with. But he was currently holding a wooden board with a sheet of paper upon it in his left hand, and a quill in his right. Between the pinkie and ring finger of his left hand, he also carried a bottle of ink.

“Any particular time you want to stand guard at night? Just asking in case there’s any times you’d do better or worse.”

“I should be fine at any time, but I’m strong at night in general. I’ve gone hunting very late before, and I think I have pretty good night vision.”

“No particular time, strong at night, and with good night vision. Got it,” Lucas repeated as he wrote with the quill. I guess he was asking because some adventurers might have low blood pressure or something. I had no experience with that myself, but from what I remembered of an old coworker, it could be very dangerous. “Alright, thanks for your cooperation. I’ll tell you what time you’re getting later. If you’ve got nothing else to do, take a cursory look around the place. You too, Howard.”

“Understood.”

Adventurers could look unscrupulous at first glance, but they had meticulous jobs.



“Come on, pull harder!”

“I’m pulling, I’m pulling!”

“I’m going to fetch some water. Be right back.”

My preparations were done, so I decided to go have a look around with Howard.

“I don’t see any problems here.”

Some of the students were taking a bit long, but nobody needed assistance.

“Just the first day, after all. Not likely to be any big troublemakers on the—”

“What’d you say?!”

“Oh, great, a fight? Guess I spoke too soon.”

“Let’s go.”

We went around a tent to see where the voice came from. Beck’s

party and another group of four boys were silently glaring at each other. It looked like a hostile situation.

“Hey, what’s all the commotion?”

“Ack!”

“I wouldn’t call it commotion.”

“Yeah, that!”

“Me neither.”

The group of four panicked in reaction to Howard’s question.

“We were just discussing the idea of looking for something to eat.”

“Then these guys started arguing with us and we got a little loud, that’s all.”

“You’re the ones who started it, not us.”

The four boys responded to Beck’s point by getting hostile again.

“Ryoma, looks like we should separate these two groups before we ask what happened.”

“Agreed. Can I talk to the group of six? I know them, so I think it’d be easier for me.”

“Sure, then I’ll take the other four.”

Thus, I took the six of them to my campsite, created a table and some chairs with earth magic, and asked for their side of the story.

“So, what the heck happened?”

“I mean, same thing that usually happens. I told you that there were these guys who make fun of Wist, right? That’s these guys.”

I’d forgotten about that, but yes, they had brought it up. Apparently they were referring to these four.

“They’re strong. I don’t like them as people, but I can’t deny they’re good at hunting.”

“Um, between picking herbs and hunting, hunting’s more profitable. And all they do is hunt, so compared to us who mostly just pick herbs, they make a lot of money.”

“They make fun of us a lot for picking herbs.”

“Even just now when we were talking about finding food, they taunted us saying we were going to eat grass.”

It sounded like that was what started the argument. When I asked for further details, my suspicions were confirmed in that most of the arguing was done by Beck. He was always one to do that. But it didn’t seem like he physically attacked them.

“Alright, got it.”

“Um, are we getting punished?”

“I don’t know what the other teachers will decide to do, but personally, I think we can let you off with a warning. I see no signs that either side of this conflict hurt the other, and from what you’re saying, it’s not entirely your fault. Beck, I think it’d be best if you worked on your short temper, but better this than doing nothing when

your friends are insulted, I guess.” Maybe I was adding fuel to the fire, but I personally couldn’t disapprove of that.

In any case, I decided to just warn them. I told them to be more careful in the future, then headed off to report this to the other teachers. They agreed to handle Beck’s party the same way I did. Also, everyone was informed of an unspoken rule: unless it was to share information to ensure safety, such as warnings about bandits or monsters, groups were not to interfere with each other.

Chapter 4 Episode 11: Poison Bug Plains

We left the camp early the next morning, and by the time the sun had risen to its highest height, we arrived at our destination: the Poison Bug Plains.

“Is everyone here? Alright! For the next three days, this is where we’re operating. First, like yesterday, everyone needs to prepare to camp! After that, I’ll talk about the rest of our plans. That is all! Get ready!”

The participants scattered. This was the Poison Bug Plains, a sprawling field with shallow hills. After a bit of walking, there were also woods where the trees were just starting to change color, and the refreshing wind carried the scent of grass. It was a peaceful place where no powerful monsters dwelled. The sunlight had also considerably softened as of late, so it felt like a fine place for a picnic.

But what we had to watch out for were the poison bugs. The Poison Bug Fields had its name for a reason, as it was absolutely teeming with poison bugs that bit humans. We had to cover our skin as much as possible, and use bug spray before we entered. For the duration of our time here, we had to keep the bugs away to the greatest extent. If we slacked off on that, it could get ugly.

“I feel kind of itchy.”

“Did a bug bite you?”

“Probably.”

“What? That’s not gonna end well.”

There were already students who got bitten. According to the information I bought in advance, none of the bugs here could kill the average human with one bite, but they would be agonizingly itchy and painful the next morning. And depending on the type of bug and the physical constitution of the person it bit, lethal effects weren’t an impossibility.

“Anyway, I’ve got my sleeping space secured,” I said. As with yesterday, I created it with earth magic. This time I made an elevated floor to keep away from the bugs crawling on the ground, and I covered the windows with wire screens so the flying bugs couldn’t get in. “Now I just need to—Oh, Roche!”

“Need something?”

“I’m going to burn some bug repellent, so I just wanted to say in

advance that it's going to get a little smoky. You were just passing by, so I thought I'd tell you."

"Is that right? Got it. Also, I was thinking this yesterday too, but that's quite the thing you've built. It's basically a hut."

"Hahaha."

It was true. Everyone else had tents, whereas I constructed a building with sturdy stone walls. To top it off, the floor was elevated, so it also stood taller than all the tents.

"Hm? You get hurt or something?" Roche asked when I took bandages out of my luggage.

"This is bug repellent, actually. I soaked these bandages in the solution and dried it to make it more portable. I made a few types of bug repellent ranging from ointment to aromas, but for large spaces such as buildings, this is best. It doesn't cost too much, it's highly effective, and it releases a lot of smoke to make things easy."

I tore off a meter-long strip of bandage and used magic to burn one of the edges. It was made of cotton, so normally it would all ignite at once, but soaking it in this solution made the fire spread slower, like burning an incense stick. It produced so much smoke that it was hard to see. Once I was sure that a good fire was going, I tossed it through the entrance and shut the door.

I waited about ten minutes for it to finish burning, creating enough bug repellent for the inside of my dwelling. Over the course of those ten minutes, I stuck the rest of the bandages on a metal skewer and ignited them. I stuck them under the elevated floor, fumigating the entire building with smoke. I paid particular attention to the windows and the underside of the entrance.

"That takes care of that!"

"Ryoma, you said you brought more than one type of bug repellent, right?"

"Yes. I have more of this too, and also some medicine in case I get bitten." I made it while I was studying medicine, so there was quite a lot of it in my Item Box.

"Really?"

"Is there something you're worried about?"

"Nah, I was just thinking that we might have it easy this time around."

"I'm sorry, can you tell me what you mean more specifically?"

"So when we hold lessons here, there are always at least a couple students who get bitten and suffer for it. Sometimes they underestimate the bugs, sometimes they don't repel them right, sometimes they don't want to spend too much on medicine and run out. There are all sorts of reasons. We'll be here for three days this time, so I'm expecting a lot of ruckus tomorrow or the next day. That's

why I brought medicine to spare, but we'll need help handing it out. Good to know we have someone who knows a lot about medicine. If you tell them about the importance of bug repellent and keeping medicine on hand when you're handing it out, sometimes you get a lot of weirdly passionate and specific questions."

"Some students ask difficult questions. Got it."

"Well, I'm sure they don't mean any harm from it. We can answer some questions, but nothing too specific."

"Do you refrain from answering when that happens?"

"Pretty much. You can't just make up an answer when you don't know something. When Mimir gets those questions, she looks up the answers when she gets back to town. So she knows more about medicine than the rest of us, and we typically leave those matters to her. She even got her emergency medical work adventurer's license recently."

"I think I can guess what that is from the highly specific name, but there's a license for that?"

"You interested?"

"It's the first I'm hearing about it, so sure. Do you know how you'd get one of those? And how many types of licenses are there? I'm kind of curious."

"There are licenses to prove your skill with each type of weapon, with making and disabling traps, with making maps—too many to list off. But to get any of these licenses, you have to apply for one through the guild. Then you go through some training and take a test, and if you pass, you get the license. There are some licenses where you can just take the test right away, but the aforementioned emergency medical work adventurer's license requires taking some classes at a designated medical guild. If you want more details about that, you ought to ask at the reception desk at the guild." I never knew that guilds did anything of the sort.

"Are there any particular licenses that are worth getting?" I asked. On Earth, there were licenses that could significantly affect your income or the jobs you could get.

"Well, can't hurt to take a course on etiquette. You'll always have to communicate with clients, and from D Rank on, you'll sometimes be meeting with the managers of big stores. When you're taking jobs from nobles especially, etiquette is a prerequisite." That didn't sound too different from making deals in Japan. "But licenses are just proof that an adventurer has a particular skill. What's really important is that you learn from the lessons. As long as you do that, you don't really need the license. Just get a status board made at the church to show you've got the necessary skills. Those are granted by the gods, so no human can tamper with them. They're actually more trustworthy

proof than licenses are. Pretty much the most reliable proof you can get.”

“So I should think of licenses as just a bonus that comes along with learning a skill?”

“More or less. If you’ve already got the skills, you don’t need to get the license. Doesn’t hurt to have one, but it’s no big deal if you don’t either. That’s why the guild recommends that new adventurers take lessons, but doesn’t typically recommend that they go for licenses. But sometimes they’ll have some rude adventurers take etiquette courses, for example, and there are also adventurers that collect licenses just for fun.”

“Huh. I actually haven’t taken any classes through the guild, so this is all new to me.”

“So you had more skills than just camping by the time you registered with the guild, I take it?”

“Yes, my grandparents were ex-adventurers, you see.”

“Then you’re probably fine for now, but as you rise through the ranks, jobs are gonna get tougher. When you start feeling like it’s too much for you, don’t feel bad about asking the guild for advice.”

“Got it, thank you!”

I was there as a teacher, but I was learning a lot myself as well.



Around an hour later, once everyone had finished setting up camp, we gathered in front of the carriages.

“Now, I’ll tell you what we’re going to do next. First of all, the students are free to rest or gather food like yesterday. However, you should have all accepted some sort of job back in Gimul. You’ve got three days here to complete your jobs, so you’d best get started on them now. Most jobs have time limits. Even if your job won’t take long to complete, you’re responsible for that job once you’ve accepted it, so you need to make sure to get it done. If you fail it, not only will you have to pay a fee, but your rating from the guild will decrease.”

The students tensed up when they heard that.

“This applies even if you get sick or injured. Exemptions can be given depending on the circumstances, but if you’re placing all your bets on that happening, then you’re not cut out to be an adventurer. I’m praying that you can all complete your jobs in the next three days. We also want you to complete those jobs on your own, but you can ask any of the teachers for advice on camping. Our job is to use this opportunity to teach you as many skills as possible. Ask all the questions you want. Might even learn something that helps with your jobs. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir!” the students replied.

“Alright! Next, I have something to tell the teachers. You’re all free to set up camp however you like, but just in case any students need guidance or some sort of emergency comes up, we need five teachers to be here at all times. I think you should remember the times we assigned at our meeting, but I’ll go over them just in case.”

Roche read from a list of times and the teachers who had to watch over the camp during them. My time was 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. I was supposed to be ready to answer questions at all times anyway, so this was just when I had to stay around this area specifically. As long as I could answer questions and solve problems swiftly during that time period, I could sit, lie down, eat, or do whatever else I felt like. Once, I’d had a physically laborious part-time job where new recruits weren’t even allowed to sit during breaks for some reason, so the rules for this seemed relatively lax. But if the veterans were saying it was fine, I had no reason to argue.

“Lastly, everyone’s standing guard at night at the same times as yesterday. Good luck, everyone. That is all! Everyone but the teachers may leave!”

Thus, the camping lessons at the Poison Bug Plains began in earnest.

Extra Story: Reunion

“Another assault incident!”

In one room of an office building bearing a sign that read ‘Development Department 3,’ about half of the department’s employees had gathered before business hours began. They were reading magazines and listening to the news on their phones.

“This incident happened in broad daylight. What do you think, everyone?” One employee started to watch a talk show on his phone. The grumbling of their guest stars droned on.

The commentator responded. “It’s quite the unfortunate event, but I’m more curious about the actions of the man they arrested.”

“What do you mean?”

“Take a look at this flip-book. It contains a summary of the events.”

The commentator took out a flip-book that detailed everything from the moments before the incident to the arrest of the suspect. It was put in simple terms to make it easy for the audience to understand.

“It looks like the victim and the culprit were friends.”

“Yes, they happened to encounter each other in the restaurant and sat by each other, according to the testimony of some women sitting near them. The perpetrator had already been drinking for two hours at that point and was quite drunk. A casual comment from the man next to him triggered the incident.”

The death of their coworker Takebayashi, and the arrest of Iguchi, got an explosion of coverage from the news and online. It harmed the man’s reputation, so he was drinking to relieve the stress from it. It was unclear if his friend expressed ill will toward him or if he was concerned and trying to help. Either way, this was caused when the topic of the company was brought up.

“Right after he struck the victim on the head with a bottle, there was an uproar in the restaurant, the man was restrained by its employees, and he was swiftly taken to the police. After his arrest, the man claimed that he thought this friend was his boss and that he had nothing against him, admitting to the assault, but purporting that it was an accident.”

The news continued. The man watching it on his phone sighed for the umpteenth time.

“Someone just had to pour fuel on the fire again.”

“Tabuchi, this is hardly just a fire anymore. It’s a goddamn inferno!”

When Tabuchi looked up from his phone, a female employee thrust a magazine in front of his face. It exposed how the very coworker being reported about on television committed similar acts on a daily basis, and that he had previously done the same to Takebayashi.

“And that’s not all. Look at this. It’s an online article from the same magazine company. I dunno how they got this, but there’s a video too.”

“Wow, that’s definitely Hosoya and Takebayashi. His face is blurred out, but judging by the suit and voice, that’s the department chief with them too.”

“Has to be. Only a matter of time till the chief gets implicated too, I’d think.”

“The comments are already demanding that they show his face. Iguchi, Hosoya, and now presumably the chief are all getting arrested, and a whole bunch else about the harmful practices at this company is being leaked.”

“I think this place might be done for.”

The employees were uneasy and had no hope for the company, but some were a little optimistic. They felt like they may lose their jobs, but that was understandable. And the eldest of them, Baba, had secretly spoken to them about finding employment elsewhere, so there was hope to be found there. Without that, they may not have been able to discuss these incidents so laxly. Despite the company’s crisis, this department was somehow relaxed.

Suddenly, a man barged in and said, “Hey, everyone! How’s it going?”

“Chief?!”

“Good morning!”

When they noticed who it was, the employees promptly greeted him. The chief gave them a wide smile and told them to take it easy. But the employees could only find his intrusion unsettling.

“One of our coworkers just died, and two were arrested.”

“Obviously it’s not going well.”

“Hell, what’re you in such a good mood for?”

“Hm? Say something?”

The employees muttered their complaints, but thankfully the chief didn’t hear. But the magazines in their hands caught his eyes.

“What are these magazines?”

“Oh, well...”

“Never mind, work hasn’t started yet, it’s fine. You work here,

after all. I'm sure you want to know how the company's doing."

The chief seemed to have some idea as to what was in those magazines, but he was lenient with them nonetheless. The employees of Department 3 knew that he would normally shout at them to do their jobs if they were reading a magazine, whether it was before working hours or not. His behavior confounded them.

Baba stepped up to confront him and ask for the truth. "Chief, what brings you here today?"

"You're here too, Baba? Perfect! There are a few things I need to tell everyone. Listen carefully." The chief waited for our attention, then cleared his throat and started talking again. "It's been nothing but bad news lately, but today I come bearing good news. The company will be holding a funeral for Takebayashi.

"Now, before you say anything, let me finish," the chief said, spreading his arms and silencing the employees when they started to chatter. "I know what you want to say. Our company hasn't done anything of the sort in its history. But Takebayashi worked here for, what, ten? At least ten years? In deference to his contributions to the company, the big wigs are offering to give him a proper sendoff. This isn't something we'd normally do for just some random employee, you know. This is a huge honor! I'm sure Takebayashi would be happy! Now clap!" he demanded for some reason, so the employees clapped by reflex. But the chief looked sour about it. "Now, Baba."

"Yes?" Baba answered.

The chief held out his right hand. "Give me a handshake, Baba."

"Uh, okay."

"Congrats. Starting today, you're the chief of this department!"

"Then what does that make you, Chief?"

"After the incident with Iguchi, and now the incident with Hosoya yesterday, someone has to take responsibility for all these scandals. For my failure to manage my employees, I'll be getting demoted. That's why you're the chief now. You'll be taking over this department. Now, everyone, clap!"

We started to clap again, but louder than before, and with less discomfort from anyone. Until the ex-chief opened his mouth again, at least.

"So, Baba, now that you've been appointed as chief, you've got a job to do. At a meeting last night, the top brass decided to hold a press conference about these scandals. As the chief of Department 3, you need to attend."

"What?!"

"Hey!"

"That will be all! Baba, go to Meeting Room 3 on the fifth floor at 11. You need to prepare for the press conference."

“Chief, wait!”

“You’re the chief now, Baba. It’s already official. As Takebayashi’s former boss, I have to prepare for the funeral, so I’ll be going now. I’ll work with you on inheriting my duties later. At any rate, Baba, go to Meeting Room 3 on the fifth floor today at 11. Don’t forget. That aside, do your jobs as normal!”

The ex-chief ignored the chaos and left before anyone could argue. The employees were left with more rage than they could express in words.

“What a fucking ghoul!”

“I thought he was humbly stepping down, but he just didn’t want to be the scapegoat at this press conference, I guess.”

“And what are they trying to pull, holding a funeral for Takebayashi now?”

“Not only are they being pushy with it, but it’s obviously just a way for them to save face.”

“So they’re gonna keep exploiting him even when he’s dead, huh?”

As everyone else complained about how unfair it was, Baba remained silent. Tabuchi noticed this and approached him.

“I suppose this is perfect.”

“Baba?”

“Uh... oh, Tabuchi. What is it?”

“Well, you suddenly went quiet, so I was wondering if you were okay. What do you mean by ‘this is perfect’? It seems to me like you only stand to lose from this.”

“Well, they might use me as a scapegoat. But depending on how you think about it, this could prove beneficial.” The positive words from the person who stood to lose the most drew everyone’s attention. “At any rate, I’m the chief now, so I’m not one to argue. So, as the chief, I have one order for you. Write your letter of resignation immediately.”

“Wait a second! What are you talking about?”

“Maybe I’m being too hasty. But remember what we discussed. This is a chance to take one step toward that,” Baba said, listlessly scratching his head.

Quitting the company required going through a whole process. Rather than just submitting a letter of resignation and being done with it, a number of things had to be exchanged between the company and the employee. Typically, a request to resign had to be submitted to one’s boss one or two months before the resignation date. But that boss usually rejected requests to resign.

“That’s why we’ve had employees who suddenly stopped coming to work. You’ve all seen it happen many times, right?” Baba asked.

Nobody responded because it went without saying that it was true. "But now, I'm your boss. I'll accept your resignations."

The constitution of Japan was supposed to guarantee the freedom to choose one's occupation, and civil law also stated that if a resignation was requested at least two weeks before the resignation date, the employee was free to resign. Companies didn't normally have the right to reject a resignation request, nor were there regulations that made this company need to extend that two week period to a month. Baba was quick to point out that this was a chance for everyone to submit their resignations.

"The old chief didn't decide what to do with me. He doesn't have the right to hold a funeral for Takebayashi, either. These decisions would all have to come from this company's top brass."

"I suppose that's true."

"I intend to quit this company, but until then, I'm still an employee. Doing your duty for as long as you're employed is what we must do, as responsible adults."

Not everyone could fully accept this, but nobody argued.

Baba spoke more to put them at ease. "Besides, to be honest, I'm glad this is happening, in a way. I don't want to leave here feeling regret about things. Takebayashi, Iguchi, and Hosoya are no strangers to us. At the very least, I want to see this problem through to the end. Maybe it's a lot to ask, but I'd like to see this settled in a way I can accept. The old chief wasn't good enough for that, and the upper brass probably know it."

Baba kept talking for a while.



Later that night, Tabuchi was on the train.

"So we made it in the end," he thought to himself. "Baba's right... there's not much we can do. But I'm still not sure about this."

The many scandals led to a series of canceled orders from the company's clients. That resulted in a lot of work being put off and a lot of exhaustion. Employees were also let off a little early because of the press conference, so they missed rush hour and there were still seats left open on the train. The rhythmic rumbling of the train was perfect for losing oneself in thought. It could almost put one to sleep.

"Ah?! Wait, what? Oops, I missed my stop," Tabuchi said as he woke up. He immediately checked to see if his bag was still there, then got off at the next station. "At least I'm still not too far from home."

Relieved that this mistake wouldn't affect his job, Tabuchi checked the trains heading in the opposite direction and noticed something. This was the station closest to Takebayashi's house. In fact,

it was the station that he and Iguchi visited on the day that he found the body. Strangely uneasy, Tabuchi headed for the platform on the other side. He didn't want to stay for too long, but then someone approached him.

"Excuse me!"

"Yes?! What is it?"

Some fairly casual men who looked to be college age surrounded Tabuchi.

"So you were with that guy who did the murder here before, right?"

"You idiot! It wasn't murder, it was obstruction of a public servant's duties."

"You sure? Whatever, I mean the guy in this video."

One of the men showed a video on his phone. It was the video the ex-chief showed the other day where Iguchi lashed out on a train.

"Oh, we're not gonna do anything, don't worry."

"Yeah, just wanted to talk to you."

"Ever heard of NowNews?"

"You run a video channel, don't you?"

"So you do know?!"

Tabuchi did, in fact, know. They were a fairly popular channel on a famous video site. Tabuchi realized that this was the team that produced those videos. And Tabuchi thought they were seriously going to use him as the subject of a video.

"Wait!"

"Hey!"

"I can't talk about it! Sorry."

"Wait!"

"Just tell us a little!"

Tabuchi ran past them and down a nearby flight of stairs. He used his prepaid ticket at the gate and left the station. After running for a while longer, he had a question for himself. "Why am I panicking so much?"

Tabuchi was always bad with people like those. Maybe getting surrounded made him lose his composure. If he had stayed there, maybe it really would have gotten frustrating. But he didn't know if there was such a need to flee like that. Tabuchi sorely lacked exercise, so his body screamed out in pain from the running and forced him to walk and catch his breath.

"Oh? Is that you, Tabuchi?"

"Eep!"

Now someone else took him off guard.

"Did I startle you? Sorry. But we met before, remember?"

"Oh, aren't you Takebayashi's neighbor?"

“Urami, yes. What brings you here today?”

“Oh, uh, well, I got off work early, so you know how it is. What about you?”

“Uh, what? Well, I was just on the way home from work myself.”

“Huh?! Oh...”

When Tabuchi started running, he probably went down a familiar path without thinking about it. He found himself just outside Takebayashi’s apartment.

“You seem tired. Would you like to come in?”

Urami and Tabuchi, two men connected to Takebayashi who knew next to nothing about each other, had met once again.

Afterword

Hello, this is Roy, the author of *By the Grace of the Gods*! Thank you for purchasing Volume 5! We've made it to the fifth volume thanks to your support, and at the time of this writing, there are two volumes of the manga version on sale as well.

The production of this volume was done in a different environment from the first four. Those who read my reports on the website *Shosetsuka ni Naro* probably know this already, but I've moved to a different house. It's way out in the countryside, where there are tarantulas, snakes, centipedes, rabbits, wild ducks, and boars popping up regularly. Thankfully, I only heard about those last two being around from my neighbors, but who knows when I'll run into them. The tarantulas aren't poisonous, and they actually eat the other bugs, so the locals consider them useful to have around. But some of the snakes and boars are apparently very dangerous.

As some of you pointed out on my online report, this sort of brings me closer to Ryoma's environment. Maybe being closer to nature and wild animals could help with my creativity. I'm using this new environment as a chance to get a fresh perspective and keep improving, so I hope you'll continue to support me in the future.

Bonus Short Stories

Dolce's Diary (Founding Festival Chapter)

Another day of writing in my diary. I feel like I've been repeatedly covering the same topic recently, but yes, my topic is the Founding Festival. It happened today, in fact, so what else would I write about?

The whole town was oddly quiet this morning. It was like the last few weeks of activity had suddenly been suppressed. But it hadn't disappeared, and when the bell finally rang, the festival began. The cheers of the surge of visitors spread instantly across the city.

I walked out into town on my own. Using some money I saved up, I set out to enjoy the festival for probably the first time.

"Hey there, man!"

"Want to eat some of this?"

"It's cold and delicious!"

Clerks cried out for me to buy their products as I got something to eat from one of the food stands.

This wasn't my first time at the festival; it happened every year. However, I never had any money for it until now. I never had enough money for more than a few days' worth of food at any given time, so all I could do was look at the festival stands from afar. There were some that sold dolls, or had games to play to win prizes, but I would never even think of spending money on something that couldn't fill my stomach back then.

I also couldn't enjoy the event due to how much my clothes betrayed my lack of wealth. Someone with extravagant clothes is a noble or otherwise wealthy. Even without that, as long as someone's clothes are new and in good shape, you can assume that they have a decent income. Most families buy used clothes to wear. New clothes are a luxury.

Those of us from the slums wear clothes from the used clothes store in our neighborhood. That place scrounges up and sews together clothes that are so ragged that not even the regular used clothes stores will sell them. They're covered in patches, of course, and small holes aren't uncommon either. It was obvious at a glance that I was poor in those clothes, so the clerks wouldn't even bother talking to me.

If you show them you have money and ask for something, though, then they'd sell it to you. I don't remember when it was, but sometime when I was young, I gave in to my curiosity and bought something to

eat. Thing is, the way people looked at me wasn't too nice. I was walking around with something I paid for, but they acted like I stole it. And when I got near any wealthier people, they treated me like a pickpocket. I was able to buy food, but at a cost that would hurt me in the following days, and I didn't want to draw all this needless suspicion either.

When I got older, I figured out that the festival wasn't for the poor to enjoy and avoided it for the most part. But it's different now. Ever since I started to work at the laundromat, they've provided food and a home for me. I started wearing clothes from a normal used clothes store too, though I don't buy replacements that often. And after I bought some clothes, I still had most of my income left.

In the same way my older brothers and sisters helped me through life when I was a kid, I've been sending my support to the slums. I've also been drinking the booze my successful brothers recommend, and I've even gone out to try some sweets that the girls at the laundromat were talking about one day. I also bought some writing utensils that Carme introduced me to and got a pretty nice set.

I still can't believe it. I can't believe I don't have to worry about money in general, but even more than that, I can't believe that today was the day I overspent and ran out. I guess I was too careless with it. I always focused on saving money before, so this is the first time I've found myself broke since I started to work for the laundromat. But like I said before, I don't have to worry about food or shelter, so I've got no anxieties in life.

But as I pursued my curiosity and partook in the festival, I ran out of money before I knew it. I had a pouch full of copper coins, so who knows where all that went? I thought it was a pickpocket at first, but after thinking about it for a while, I came to the conclusion that I just spent it all. I tried all the food and the fascinating games, shelling out money all over the place. In the past, I didn't even have the option of using money like this.

Now that I think back on it as I write this diary entry, I'm pretty confident that I simply wasted my money. Again, I don't have to worry about covering necessities as long as I take my job seriously. But I still don't think wasting money is a good habit to get into. I should try not to do it again, but I'm not sure exactly how to avoid it. All I know is that I have regrets. If I ask Carme, I'm sure he would have advice.



I put down my pen and looked over what I wrote. As I did, I again recognized that something had changed about me. I made a mistake today, but I found it kind of amusing, strangely.

Jeff and the Kids

“Bro! I bought something!”

“Nice, sit down and eat it while it’s hot.”

The Founding Festival was underway, and the streets were busy. Fitting in perfectly with the fervor of the crowd, six boys and girls had their arms full of food they’d bought from the festival stands. The man who prompted them to sit took a seat in the break area himself and handed out the drinks that he purchased.

“Here, my treat. Don’t drink it too quick.”

“Thank you!”

The kids, all under the age of fifteen, thanked him and dug into their food.

“Delicious!”

“It’s so good!”

“How do you like eating food bought with money you earned yourself? Pretty good, yeh?” the man asked. The kids responded with their actions, wolfing down the food with vigor.

“Whew, all done. Hey, Jeff, how should I go about getting stronger and making more money?”

“Huh? More than you do now, you mean? Let’s see here, you’ve all got decent equipment, right? I can keep checking to see how your combat skills are improving, but other than that, I haven’t got much else to teach you.”

“How can that be? You’re B Rank.”

“Moron. S Rank, F Rank, it’s all basically the same. You just get there with enough training and experience. You kids don’t have enough training or experience yet, but I’ve taught what I can teach as far as the basics. Beck, what are you panicking about?”

“I-I’m not panicking, not really.”

Then Jeff picked up on the cause of Beck’s uncertainty. “It’s Ryoma, isn’t it? Sounds like he’s been helping you kids out. He’s about the same age as you too, so I guess he’s making you self-conscious.”

“Heck no he’s not.”

“I knew a guy who made me feel that way, so I get it. But Beck,” Jeff said and looked up, a serious expression on his face, “don’t compare yourself to him. I’m serious. You’d think he was an ancient elf with all the skills he’s learned. For me, I was seventeen or eighteen before I could really make a living on my own.”

“Really?!”

“Of course. Before I got good enough to beat monsters without much trouble, I had to pay for food, medicine, and equipment the same way you do. Being an adventurer’s all about gradual improvement. Just make sure you’re making enough to eat, and you’re good.”

Jeff ate as he talked about his past and his mistakes, imparting adventuring tips on the children. Ryoma watched them pleasantly from his food stand, but due to the noisy crowd, he didn't hear how his name was brought up multiple times.



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by Roy

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